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THE ASPERN PAPERS

LOUISA PALLANT

THE MODERN WARNING



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THE MODERN WARNING

BY  
HENRY JAMES

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## NOTE

THE third of the following Tales originally appeared in  
*Harper's Magazine* under a different title.

THE ASPERN PAPERS





## THE ASPERN PAPERS

### I

I HAD taken Mrs. Prest into my confidence ; in truth without her I should have made but little advance, for the fruitful idea in the whole business dropped from her friendly lips. It was she who invented the short cut, who severed the Gordian knot. It is not supposed to be the nature of women to rise as a general thing to the largest and most liberal view—I mean of a practical scheme ; but it has struck me that they sometimes throw off a bold conception—such as a man would not have risen to—with singular serenity. ‘Simply ask them to take you in on the footing of a lodger’—I don’t think that unaided I should have risen to that. I was beating about the bush, trying to be ingenious, wondering by what combination of arts I might become an acquaintance, when she offered this happy suggestion that the way to become an acquaintance was first to become an inmate. Her actual knowledge of the Misses Bordereau was scarcely larger than mine, and indeed I had brought with me from England some definite facts which were new to her. Their name had been mixed up ages before with one of the greatest names

of the century, and they lived now in Venice in obscurity, on very small means, unvisited, unapproachable, in a dilapidated old palace on an out-of-the-way canal: this was the substance of my friend's impression of them. She herself had been established in Venice for fifteen years and had done a great deal of good there; but the circle of her benevolence did not include the two shy, mysterious and, as it was somehow supposed, scarcely respectable Americans (they were believed to have lost in their long exile all national quality, besides having had, as their name implied, some French strain in their origin), who asked no favours and desired no attention. In the early years of her residence she had made an attempt to see them, but this had been successful only as regards the little one, as Mrs. Prest called the niece; though in reality as I afterwards learned she was considerably the bigger of the two. She had heard Miss Bordereau was ill and had a suspicion that she was in want; and she had gone to the house to offer assistance, so that if there were suffering (and American suffering), she should at least not have it on her conscience. The 'little one' received her in the great cold, tarnished Venetian *sala*, the central hall of the house, paved with marble and roofed with dim cross-beams, and did not even ask her to sit down. This was not encouraging for me, who wished to sit so fast, and I remarked as much to Mrs. Prest. She however replied with profundity, 'Ah, but there's all the difference: I went to confer a favour and you will go to ask one. If they are proud you will be on the right side.' And she offered to show me their house to begin with—to row me thither in her gondola. I let her know that I had already been to

look at it half a dozen times ; but I accepted her invitation, for it charmed me to hover about the place. I had made my way to it the day after my arrival in Venice (it had been described to me in advance by the friend in England to whom I owed definite information as to their possession of the papers), and I had besieged it with my eyes while I considered my plan of campaign. Jeffrey Aspern had never been in it that I knew of ; but some note of his voice seemed to abide there by a roundabout implication, a faint reverberation.

Mrs. Prest knew nothing about the papers, but she was interested in my curiosity, as she was always interested in the joys and sorrows of her friends. As we went, however, in her gondola, gliding there under the sociable hood with the bright Venetian picture framed on either side by the movable window, I could see that she was amused by my infatuation, the way my interest in the papers had become a fixed idea. 'One would think you expected to find in them the answer to the riddle of the universe,' she said ; and I denied the impeachment only by replying that if I had to choose between that precious solution and a bundle of Jeffrey Aspern's letters I knew indeed which would appear to me the greater boon. She pretended to make light of his genius and I took no pains to defend him. One doesn't defend one's god : one's god is in himself a defence. Besides, to-day, after his long comparative obscurity, he hangs high in the heaven of our literature, for all the world to see ; he is a part of the light by which we walk. The most I said was that he was no doubt not a woman's poet : to which she rejoined aptly enough that he had been at least Miss Bordereau's. The strange

thing had been for me to discover in England that she was still alive : it was as if I had been told Mrs. Siddons was, or Queen Caroline, or the famous Lady Hamilton, for it seemed to me that she belonged to a generation as extinct. 'Why, she must be tremendously old—at least a hundred,' I had said ; but on coming to consider dates I saw that it was not strictly necessary that she should have exceeded by very much the common span. None the less she was very far advanced in life and her relations with Jeffrey Aspern had occurred in her early womanhood. 'That is her excuse,' said Mrs. Prest, half sententiously and yet also somewhat as if she were ashamed of making a speech so little in the real tone of Venice. As if a woman needed an excuse for having loved the divine poet ! He had been not only one of the most brilliant minds of his day (and in those years, when the century was young, there were, as every one knows, many), but one of the most genial men and one of the handsomest.

The niece, according to Mrs. Prest, was not so old, and she risked the conjecture that she was only a grand-niece. This was possible ; I had nothing but my share in the very limited knowledge of my English fellow-worshipper John Cumnor, who had never seen the couple. The world, as I say, had recognised Jeffrey Aspern, but Cumnor and I had recognised him most. The multitude, to-day, flocked to his temple, but of that temple he and I regarded ourselves as the ministers. We held, justly, as I think, that we had done more for his memory than any one else, and we had done it by opening lights into his life. He had nothing to fear from us because he had nothing to fear from the truth, which alone at such

a distance of time we could be interested in establishing. His early death had been the only dark spot in his life, unless the papers in Miss Bordereau's hands should perversely bring out others. There had been an impression about 1825 that he had 'treated her badly,' just as there had been an impression that he had 'served,' as the London populace says, several other ladies in the same way. Each of these cases Cumnor and I had been able to investigate, and we had never failed to acquit him conscientiously of shabby behaviour. I judged him perhaps more indulgently than my friend; certainly, at any rate, it appeared to me that no man could have walked straighter in the given circumstances. These were almost always awkward. Half the women of his time, to speak liberally, had flung themselves at his head, and out of this pernicious fashion many complications, some of them grave, had not failed to arise. He was not a woman's poet, as I had said to Mrs. Prest, in the modern phase of his reputation; but the situation had been different when the man's own voice was mingled with his song. That voice, by every testimony, was one of the sweetest ever heard. 'Orpheus and the Mænads!' was the exclamation that rose to my lips when I first turned over his correspondence. Almost all the Mænads were unreasonable and many of them insupportable; it struck me in short that he was kinder, more considerate than, in his place (if I could imagine myself in such a place!) I should have been.

It was certainly strange beyond all strangeness, and I shall not take up space with attempting to explain it, that whereas in all these other lines of research we had to deal with phantoms and dust, the

mere echoes of echoes, the one living source of information that had lingered on into our time had been unheeded by us. Every one of Aspern's contemporaries had, according to our belief, passed away ; we had not been able to look into a single pair of eyes into which his had looked or to feel a transmitted contact in any aged hand that his had touched. Most dead of all did poor Miss Bordereau appear, and yet she alone had survived. We exhausted in the course of months our wonder that we had not found her out sooner, and the substance of our explanation was that she had kept so quiet. The poor lady on the whole had had reason for doing so. But it was a revelation to us that it was possible to keep so quiet as that in the latter half of the nineteenth century—the age of newspapers and telegrams and photographs and interviewers. And she had taken no great trouble about it either : she had not hidden herself away in an undiscoverable hole ; she had boldly settled down in a city of exhibition. The only secret of her safety that we could perceive was that Venice contained so many curiosities that were greater than she. And then accident had somehow favoured her, as was shown for example in the fact that Mrs. Prest had never happened to mention her to me, though I had spent three weeks in Venice—under her nose, as it were—five years before. Mrs. Prest had not mentioned this much to any one ; she appeared almost to have forgotten she was there. Of course she had not the responsibilities of an editor. It was no explanation of the old woman's having eluded us to say that she lived abroad, for our researches had again and again taken us (not only by correspondence but by personal inquiry) to France,



to Germany, to Italy, in which countries, not counting his important stay in England, so many of the too few years of Aspern's career were spent. We were glad to think at least that in all our publishings (some people consider I believe that we have overdone them), we had only touched in passing and in the most discreet manner on Miss Bordereau's connection. Oddly enough, even if we had had the material (and we often wondered what had become of it), it would have been the most difficult episode to handle.

The gondola stopped, the old palace was there ; it was a house of the class which in Venice carries even in extreme dilapidation the dignified name. 'How charming ! It's gray and pink !' my companion exclaimed ; and that is the most comprehensive description of it. It was not particularly old, only two or three centuries ; and it had an air not so much of decay as of quiet discouragement, as if it had rather missed its career. But its wide front, with a stone balcony from end to end of the *piano nobile* or most important floor, was architectural enough, with the aid of various pilasters and arches ; and the stucco with which in the intervals it had long ago been endued was rosy in the April afternoon. It overlooked a clean, melancholy, unfrequented canal, which had a narrow *riva* or convenient footway on either side. 'I don't know why—there are no brick gables,' said Mrs. Prest, 'but this corner has seemed to me before more Dutch than Italian, more like Amsterdam than like Venice. It's perversely clean, for reasons of its own ; and though you can pass on foot scarcely any one ever thinks of doing so. It has the air of a Protestant Sunday. Perhaps the people

are afraid of the Misses Bordereau. I daresay they have the reputation of witches.'

I forget what answer I made to this—I was given up to two other reflections. The first of these was that if the old lady lived in such a big, imposing house she could not be in any sort of misery and therefore would not be tempted by a chance to let a couple of rooms. I expressed this idea to Mrs. Prest, who gave me a very logical reply. 'If she didn't live in a big house how could it be a question of her having rooms to spare? If she were not amply lodged herself you would lack ground to approach her. Besides, a big house here, and especially in this *quartier perdu*, proves nothing at all: it is perfectly compatible with a state of penury. Dilapidated old palazzi, if you will go out of the way for them, are to be had for five shillings a year. And as for the people who live in them—no, until you have explored Venice socially as much as I have you can form no idea of their domestic desolation. They live on nothing, for they have nothing to live on.' The other idea that had come into my head was connected with a high blank wall which appeared to confine an expanse of ground on one side of the house. Blank I call it, but it was figured over with the patches that please a painter, repaired breaches, crumbings of plaster, extrusions of brick that had turned pink with time; and a few thin trees, with the poles of certain rickety trellises, were visible over the top. The place was a garden and apparently it belonged to the house. It suddenly occurred to me that if it did belong to the house I had my pretext.

I sat looking out on all this with Mrs. Prest (it



was covered with the golden glow of Venice) from the shade of our *felze*, and she asked me if I would go in then, while she waited for me, or come back another time. At first I could not decide—it was doubtless very weak of me. I wanted still to think I *might* get a footing, and I was afraid to meet failure, for it would leave me, as I remarked to my companion, without another arrow for my bow. ‘Why not another?’ she inquired, as I sat there hesitating and thinking it over; and she wished to know why even now and before taking the trouble of becoming an inmate (which might be wretchedly uncomfortable after all, even if it succeeded), I had not the resource of simply offering them a sum of money down. In that way I might obtain the documents without bad nights.

‘Dearest lady,’ I exclaimed, ‘excuse the impatience of my tone when I suggest that you must have forgotten the very fact (surely I communicated it to you) which pushed me to throw myself upon your ingenuity. The old woman won’t have the documents spoken of; they are personal, delicate, intimate, and she hasn’t modern notions, God bless her! If I should sound that note first I should certainly spoil the game. I can arrive at the papers only by putting her off her guard, and I can put her off her guard only by ingratiating diplomatic practices. Hypocrisy, duplicity are my only chance. I am sorry for it, but for Jeffrey Aspern’s sake I would do worse still. First I must take tea with her; then tackle the main job.’ And I told over what had happened to John Cumnor when he wrote to her. No notice whatever had been taken of his first letter, and the second had been answered very sharply, in

six lines, by the niece. 'Miss Bordereau requested her to say that she could not imagine what he meant by troubling them. They had none of Mr. Aspern's papers, and if they had should never think of showing them to any one on any account whatever. She didn't know what he was talking about and begged he would let her alone.' I certainly did not want to be met that way.

'Well,' said Mrs. Prest, after a moment, provokingly, 'perhaps after all they haven't any of his things. If they deny it flat how are you sure?'

'John Cumnor is sure, and it would take me long to tell you how his conviction, or his very strong presumption—strong enough to stand against the old lady's not unnatural fib—has built itself up. Besides, he makes much of the internal evidence of the niece's letter.'

'The internal evidence?'

'Her calling him "Mr. Aspern."'

'I don't see what that proves.'

'It proves familiarity, and familiarity implies the possession of mementoes, of relics. I can't tell you how that "Mr." touches me—how it bridges over the gulf of time and brings our hero near to me—nor what an edge it gives to my desire to see Juliana. You don't say "Mr." Shakespeare.'

'Would I, any more, if I had a box full of his letters?'

'Yes, if he had been your lover and some one wanted them!' And I added that John Cumnor was so convinced, and so all the more convinced by Miss Bordereau's tone, that he would have come himself to Venice on the business were it not that for him there was the obstacle that it would be

difficult to disprove his identity with the person who had written to them, which the old ladies would be sure to suspect in spite of dissimulation and a change of name. If they were to ask him point-blank if he were not their correspondent it would be too awkward for him to lie ; whereas I was fortunately not tied in that way. I was a fresh hand and could say no without lying.

‘But you will have to change your name,’ said Mrs. Prest. ‘Juliana lives out of the world as much as it is possible to live, but none the less she has probably heard of Mr. Aspern’s editors ; she perhaps possesses what you have published.’

‘I have thought of that,’ I returned ; and I drew out of my pocket-book a visiting-card, neatly engraved with a name that was not my own.

‘You are very extravagant ; you might have written it,’ said my companion.

‘This looks more genuine.’

‘Certainly, you are prepared to go far ! But it will be awkward about your letters ; they won’t come to you in that mask.’

‘My banker will take them in and I will go every day to fetch them. It will give me a little walk.’

‘Shall you only depend upon that ?’ asked Mrs. Prest. ‘Aren’t you coming to see me ?’

‘Oh, you will have left Venice, for the hot months, long before there are any results. I am prepared to roast all summer—as well as hereafter, perhaps you’ll say ! Meanwhile, John Cumnor will bombard me with letters addressed, in my feigned name, to the care of the *padrona*.’

‘She will recognise his hand,’ my companion suggested.

‘On the envelope he can disguise it.’

‘Well, you’re a precious pair! Does’nt it occur to you that even if you are able to say you are not Mr. Cumnor in person they may still suspect you of being his emissary?’

‘Certainly, and I see only one way to parry that.’

‘And what may that be?’

I hesitated a moment. ‘To make love to the niece.’

‘Ah,’ cried Mrs. Prest, ‘wait till you see her!’

## II

‘I MUST work the garden—I must work the garden,’ I said to myself, five minutes later, as I waited, upstairs, in the long, dusky sala, where the bare scagliola floor gleamed vaguely in a chink of the closed shutters. The place was impressive but it looked cold and cautious. Mrs. Prest had floated away, giving me a rendezvous at the end of half an hour by some neighbouring water-steps ; and I had been let into the house, after pulling the rusty bell-wire, by a little red-headed, white-faced maid-servant, who was very young and not ugly and wore clicking pattens and a shawl in the fashion of a hood. She had not contented herself with opening the door from above by the usual arrangement of a creaking pulley, though she had looked down at me first from an upper window, dropping the inevitable challenge which in Italy precedes the hospitable act. As a general thing I was irritated by this survival of mediæval manners, though as I liked the old I suppose I ought to have liked it ; but I was so determined to be genial that I took my false card out of my pocket and held it up to her, smiling as if it were a magic token. It had the effect of one indeed, for it brought her, as I say, all the way down. I begged her to hand it to her mistress, having first

written on it in Italian the words, 'Could you very kindly see a gentleman, an American, for a moment?' The little maid was not hostile, and I reflected that even that was perhaps something gained. She coloured, she smiled and looked both frightened and pleased. I could see that my arrival was a great affair, that visits were rare in that house, and that she was a person who would have liked a sociable place. When she pushed forward the heavy door behind me I felt that I had a foot in the citadel. She pattered across the damp, stony lower hall and I followed her up the high staircase—stonier still, as it seemed—without an invitation. I think she had meant I should wait for her below, but such was not my idea, and I took up my station in the sala. She flitted, at the far end of it, into impenetrable regions, and I looked at the place with my heart beating as I had known it to do in the dentist's parlour. It was gloomy and stately, but it owed its character almost entirely to its noble shape and to the fine architectural doors—as high as the doors of houses—which, leading into the various rooms, repeated themselves on either side at intervals. They were surmounted with old faded painted escutcheons, and here and there, in the spaces between them, brown pictures, which I perceived to be bad, in battered frames, were suspended. With the exception of several straw-bottomed chairs with their backs to the wall, the grand obscure vista contained nothing else to minister to effect. It was evidently never used save as a passage, and little even as that. I may add that by the time the door opened again through which the maid-servant had escaped, my eyes had grown used to the want of light.

I had not meant by my private ejaculation that I must myself cultivate the soil of the tangled enclosure which lay beneath the windows, but the lady who came toward me from the distance over the hard, shining floor might have supposed as much from the way in which, as I went rapidly to meet her, I exclaimed, taking care to speak Italian: 'The garden, the garden—do me the pleasure to tell me if it's yours!'

She stopped short, looking at me with wonder; and then, 'Nothing here is mine,' she answered in English, coldly and sadly.

'Oh, you are English; how delightful!' I remarked, ingenuously. 'But surely the garden belongs to the house?'

'Yes, but the house doesn't belong to me.' She was a long, lean, pale person, habited apparently in a dull-coloured dressing-gown, and she spoke with a kind of mild literalness. She did not ask me to sit down, any more than years before (if she were the niece) she had asked Mrs. Prest, and we stood face to face in the empty pompous hall.

'Well then, would you kindly tell me to whom I must address myself? I'm afraid you'll think me odiously intrusive, but you know I *must* have a garden—upon my honour I must!'

Her face was not young, but it was simple; it was not fresh, but it was mild. She had large eyes which were not bright, and a great deal of hair which was not 'dressed,' and long fine hands which were—possibly—not clean. She clasped these members almost convulsively as, with a confused, alarmed look, she broke out, 'Oh, don't take it away from us; we like it ourselves!'



‘You have the use of it then?’

‘Oh yes. If it wasn’t for that!’ And she gave a shy, melancholy smile.

‘Isn’t it a luxury, precisely? That’s why, intending to be in Venice some weeks, possibly all summer, and having some literary work, some reading and writing to do, so that I must be quiet, and yet if possible a great deal in the open air—that’s why I have felt that a garden is really indispensable. I appeal to your own experience,’ I went on, smiling. ‘Now can’t I look at yours?’

‘I don’t know, I don’t understand,’ the poor woman murmured, planted there and letting her embarrassed eyes wander all over my strangeness.

‘I mean only from one of those windows—such grand ones as you have here—if you will let me open the shutters.’ And I walked toward the back of the house. When I had advanced half-way I stopped and waited, as if I took it for granted she would accompany me. I had been of necessity very abrupt, but I strove at the same time to give her the impression of extreme courtesy. ‘I have been looking at furnished rooms all over the place, and it seems impossible to find any with a garden attached. Naturally in a place like Venice gardens are rare. It’s absurd if you like, for a man, but I can’t live without flowers.’

‘There are none to speak of down there.’ She came nearer to me, as if, though she mistrusted me, I had drawn her by an invisible thread. I went on again, and she continued as she followed me: ‘We have a few, but they are very common. It costs too much to cultivate them; one has to have a man.’

‘Why shouldn’t I be the man?’ I asked. ‘I’ll



work without wages ; or rather I'll put in a gardener. You shall have the sweetest flowers in Venice.'

She protested at this, with a queer little sigh which might also have been a gush of rapture at the picture I presented. Then she observed, 'We don't know you—we don't know you.'

'You know me as much as I know you ; that is much more, because you know my name. And if you are English I am almost a countryman.'

'We are not English,' said my companion, watching me helplessly while I threw open the shutters of one of the divisions of the wide high window.

'You speak the language so beautifully : might I ask what you are ?' Seen from above the garden was certainly shabby ; but I perceived at a glance that it had great capabilities. She made no rejoinder, she was so lost in staring at me, and I exclaimed, 'You don't mean to say you are also by chance American ?'

'I don't know ; we used to be.'

'Used to be ? Surely you haven't changed ?'

'It's so many years ago—we are nothing.'

'So many years that you have been living here ? Well, I don't wonder at that ; it's a grand old house. I suppose you all use the garden,' I went on, 'but I assure you I shouldn't be in your way. I would be very quiet and stay in one corner.'

'We all use it ?' she repeated after me, vaguely, not coming close to the window but looking at my shoes. She appeared to think me capable of throwing her out.

'I mean all your family, as many as you are.'

'There is only one other ; she is very old—she never goes down.'

‘Only one other, in all this great house!’ I feigned to be not only amazed but almost scandalised. ‘Dear lady, you must have space then to spare!’

‘To spare?’ she repeated, in the same dazed way.

‘Why, you surely don’t live (two quiet women—I see *you* are quiet, at any rate) in fifty rooms!’ Then with a burst of hope and cheer I demanded: ‘Couldn’t you let me two or three? That would set me up!’

I had now struck the note that translated my purpose and I need not reproduce the whole of the tune I played. I ended by making my interlocutress believe that I was an honourable person, though of course I did not even attempt to persuade her that I was not an eccentric one. I repeated that I had studies to pursue; that I wanted quiet; that I delighted in a garden and had vainly sought one up and down the city; that I would undertake that before another month was over the dear old house should be smothered in flowers. I think it was the flowers that won my suit, for I afterwards found that Miss Tita (for such the name of this high tremulous spinster proved somewhat incongruously to be) had an insatiable appetite for them. When I speak of my suit as won I mean that before I left her she had promised that she would refer the question to her aunt. I inquired who her aunt might be and she answered, ‘Why, Miss Bordereau!’ with an air of surprise, as if I might have been expected to know. There were contradictions like this in Tita Bordereau which, as I observed later, contributed to make her an odd and affecting person. It was the study of

the two ladies to live so that the world should not touch them, and yet they had never altogether accepted the idea that it never heard of them. In Tita at any rate a grateful susceptibility to human contact had not died out, and contact of a limited order there would be if I should come to live in the house.

‘We have never done anything of the sort ; we have never had a lodger or any kind of inmate.’ So much as this she made a point of saying to me. ‘We are very poor, we live very badly. The rooms are very bare—that you might take ; they have nothing in them. I don’t know how you would sleep, how you would eat.’

‘With your permission, I could easily put in a bed and a few tables and chairs. *C’est la moindre des choses* and the affair of an hour or two. I know a little man from whom I can hire what I should want for a few months, for a trifle, and my gondolier can bring the things round in his boat. Of course in this great house you must have a second kitchen, and my servant, who is a wonderfully handy fellow’ (this personage was an evocation of the moment), ‘can easily cook me a chop there. My tastes and habits are of the simplest ; I live on flowers!’ And then I ventured to add that if they were very poor it was all the more reason they should let their rooms. They were bad economists—I had never heard of such a waste of material.

I saw in a moment that the good lady had never before been spoken to in that way, with a kind of humorous firmness which did not exclude sympathy but was on the contrary founded on it. She might easily have told me that my sympathy was im-

pertinent, but this by good fortune did not occur to her. I left her with the understanding that she would consider the matter with her aunt and that I might come back the next day for their decision.

‘The aunt will refuse ; she will think the whole proceeding very *louche* !’ Mrs. Prest declared shortly after this, when I had resumed my place in her gondola. She had put the idea into my head and now (so little are women to be counted on) she appeared to take a despondent view of it. Her pessimism provoked me and I pretended to have the best hopes ; I went so far as to say that I had a distinct presentiment that I should succeed. Upon this Mrs. Prest broke out, ‘Oh, I see what’s in your head ! You fancy you have made such an impression in a quarter of an hour that she is dying for you to come and can be depended upon to bring the old one round. If you do get in you’ll count it as a triumph.’

I did count it as a triumph, but only for the editor (in the last analysis), not for the man, who had not the tradition of personal conquest. When I went back on the morrow the little maid-servant conducted me straight through the long sala (it opened there as before in perfect perspective and was lighter now, which I thought a good omen) into the apartment from which the recipient of my former visit had emerged on that occasion. It was a large shabby parlour, with a fine old painted ceiling and a strange figure sitting alone at one of the windows. They come back to me now almost with the palpitation they caused, the successive feelings that accompanied my consciousness that as the door of the room closed behind me I was really face to face

with the Juliana of some of Aspern's most exquisite and most renowned lyrics. I grew used to her afterwards, though never completely ; but as she sat there before me my heart beat as fast as if the miracle of resurrection had taken place for my benefit. Her presence seemed somehow to contain his, and I felt nearer to him at that first moment of seeing her than I ever had been before or ever have been since. Yes, I remember my emotions in their order, even including a curious little tremor that took me when I saw that the niece was not there. With her, the day before, I had become sufficiently familiar, but it almost exceeded my courage (much as I had longed for the event) to be left alone with such a terrible relic as the aunt. She was too strange, too literally resurgent. Then came a check, with the perception that we were not really face to face, inasmuch as she had over her eyes a horrible green shade which, for her, served almost as a mask. I believed for the instant that she had put it on expressly, so that from underneath it she might scrutinise me without being scrutinised herself. At the same time it increased the presumption that there was a ghastly death's-head lurking behind it. The divine Juliana as a grinning skull—the vision hung there until it passed. Then it came to me that she *was* tremendously old—so old that death might take her at any moment, before I had time to get what I wanted from her. The next thought was a correction to that ; it lighted up the situation. She would die next week, she would die to-morrow—then I could seize her papers. Meanwhile she sat there neither moving nor speaking. She was very small and shrunken, bent forward, with her hands in

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her lap. She was dressed in black and her head was wrapped in a piece of old black lace which showed no hair.

My emotion keeping me silent she spoke first, and the remark she made was exactly the most unexpected.

### III

‘OUR house is very far from the centre, but the little canal is very *comme il faut*.’

‘It’s the sweetest corner of Venice and I can imagine nothing more charming,’ I hastened to reply. The old lady’s voice was very thin and weak, but it had an agreeable, cultivated murmur and there was wonder in the thought that that individual note had been in Jeffrey Aspern’s ear.

‘Please to sit down there. I hear very well,’ she said quietly, as if perhaps I had been shouting at her; and the chair she pointed to was at a certain distance. I took possession of it, telling her that I was perfectly aware that I had intruded, that I had not been properly introduced and could only throw myself upon her indulgence. Perhaps the other lady, the one I had had the honour of seeing the day before, would have explained to her about the garden. That was literally what had given me courage to take a step so unconventional. I had fallen in love at sight with the whole place (she herself probably was so used to it that she did not know the impression it was capable of making on a stranger), and I had felt it was really a case to risk something. Was her own kindness in receiving me



a sign that I was not wholly out in my calculation? It would render me extremely happy to think so. I could give her my word of honour that I was a most respectable, inoffensive person and that as an inmate they would be barely conscious of my existence. I would conform to any regulations, any restrictions if they would only let me enjoy the garden. Moreover I should be delighted to give her references, guarantees; they would be of the very best, both in Venice and in England as well as in America.

She listened to me in perfect stillness and I felt that she was looking at me with great attention, though I could see only the lower part of her bleached and shrivelled face. Independently of the refining process of old age it had a delicacy which once must have been great. She had been very fair, she had had a wonderful complexion. She was silent a little after I had ceased speaking; then she inquired, 'If you are so fond of a garden why don't you go to *terra firma*, where there are so many far better than this?'

'Oh, it's the combination!' I answered, smiling; and then, with rather a flight of fancy, 'It's the idea of a garden in the middle of the sea.'

'It's not in the middle of the sea; you can't see the water.'

I stared a moment, wondering whether she wished to convict me of fraud. 'Can't see the water? Why, dear madam, I can come up to the very gate in my boat.'

She appeared inconsequent, for she said vaguely in reply to this, 'Yes, if you have got a boat. I haven't any; it's many years since I have been in



one of the gondolas.' She uttered these words as if the gondolas were a curious far-away craft which she knew only by hearsay.

'Let me assure you of the pleasure with which I would put mine at your service!' I exclaimed. I had scarcely said this however before I became aware that the speech was in questionable taste and might also do me the injury of making me appear too eager, too possessed of a hidden motive. But the old woman remained impenetrable and her attitude bothered me by suggesting that she had a fuller vision of me than I had of her. She gave me no thanks for my somewhat extravagant offer but remarked that the lady I had seen the day before was her niece; she would presently come in. She had asked her to stay away a little on purpose, because she herself wished to see me at first alone. She relapsed into silence and I asked myself why she had judged this necessary and what was coming yet; also whether I might venture on some judicious remark in praise of her companion. I went so far as to say that I should be delighted to see her again: she had been so very courteous to me, considering how odd she must have thought me—a declaration which drew from Miss Bordereau another of her whimsical speeches.

'She has very good manners; I bred her up myself!' I was on the point of saying that that accounted for the easy grace of the niece, but I arrested myself in time, and the next moment the old woman went on: 'I don't care who you may be—I don't want to know; it signifies very little to-day.' This had all the air of being a formula of dismissal, as if her next words would be that I might

take myself off now that she had had the amusement of looking on the face of such a monster of indiscretion. Therefore I was all the more surprised when she added, with her soft, venerable quaver, 'You may have as many rooms as you like—if you will pay a good deal of money.'

I hesitated but for a single instant, long enough to ask myself what she meant in particular by this condition. First it struck me that she must have really a large sum in her mind; then I reasoned quickly that her idea of a large sum would probably not correspond to my own. My deliberation, I think, was not so visible as to diminish the promptitude with which I replied, 'I will pay with pleasure and of course in advance whatever you may think it proper to ask me.'

'Well then, a thousand francs a month,' she rejoined instantly, while her baffling green shade continued to cover her attitude.

The figure, as they say, was startling and my logic had been at fault. The sum she had mentioned was, by the Venetian measure of such matters, exceedingly large; there was many an old palace in an out-of-the-way corner that I might on such terms have enjoyed by the year. But so far as my small means allowed I was prepared to spend money, and my decision was quickly taken. I would pay her with a smiling face what she asked, but in that case I would give myself the compensation of extracting the papers from her for nothing. Moreover if she had asked five times as much I should have risen to the occasion; so odious would it have appeared to me to stand chaffering with Aspern's Juliana. It was queer enough to have a question of money with

her at all. I assured her that her views perfectly met my own and that on the morrow I should have the pleasure of putting three months' rent into her hand. She received this announcement with serenity and with no apparent sense that after all it would be becoming of her to say that I ought to see the rooms first. This did not occur to her and indeed her serenity was mainly what I wanted. Our little bargain was just concluded when the door opened and the younger lady appeared on the threshold. As soon as Miss Bordereau saw her niece she cried out almost gaily, 'He will give three thousand—three thousand to-morrow!'

Miss Tita stood still, with her patient eyes turning from one of us to the other; then she inquired, scarcely above her breath, 'Do you mean francs?'

'Did you mean francs or dollars?' the old woman asked of me at this.

'I think francs were what you said,' I answered, smiling.

'That is very good,' said Miss Tita, as if she had become conscious that her own question might have looked over-reaching.

'What do *you* know? You are ignorant,' Miss Bordereau remarked; not with acerbity but with a strange, soft coldness.

'Yes, of money—certainly of money!' Miss Tita hastened to exclaim.

'I am sure you have your own branches of knowledge,' I took the liberty of saying, genially. There was something painful to me, somehow, in the turn the conversation had taken, in the discussion of the rent.

'She had a very good education when she was

young. I looked into that myself,' said Miss Bordereau. Then she added, 'But she has learned nothing since.'

'I have always been with you,' Miss Tita rejoined very mildly, and evidently with no intention of making an epigram.

'Yes, but for that!' her aunt declared, with more satirical force. She evidently meant that but for this her niece would never have got on at all; the point of the observation however being lost on Miss Tita, though she blushed at hearing her history revealed to a stranger. Miss Bordereau went on, addressing herself to me: 'And what time will you come to-morrow with the money?'

'The sooner the better. If it suits you I will come at noon.'

'I am always here but I have my hours,' said the old woman, as if her convenience were not to be taken for granted.

'You mean the times when you receive?'

'I never receive. But I will see you at noon, when you come with the money.'

'Very good, I shall be punctual;' and I added, 'May I shake hands with you, on our contract?' I thought there ought to be some little form, it would make me really feel easier, for I foresaw that there would be no other. Besides, though Miss Bordereau could not to-day be called personally attractive and there was something even in her wasted antiquity that bade one stand at one's distance, I felt an irresistible desire to hold in my own for a moment the hand that Jeffrey Aspern had pressed.

For a minute she made no answer and I saw that my proposal failed to meet with her approba-

tion. She indulged in no movement of withdrawal, which I half expected; she only said coldly, 'I belong to a time when that was not the custom.'

I felt rather snubbed but I exclaimed good-humouredly to Miss Tita, 'Oh, you will do as well!' I shook hands with her while she replied, with a small flutter, 'Yes, yes, to show it's all arranged!'

'Shall you bring the money in gold?' Miss Bordereau demanded, as I was turning to the door.

I looked at her a moment. 'Aren't you a little afraid, after all, of keeping such a sum as that in the house?' It was not that I was annoyed at her avidity but I was really struck with the disparity between such a treasure and such scanty means of guarding it.

'Whom should I be afraid of if I am not afraid of you?' she asked with her shrunken grimness.

'Ah well,' said I, laughing, 'I shall be in point of fact a protector and I will bring gold if you prefer.'

'Thank you,' the old woman returned with dignity and with an inclination of her head which evidently signified that I might depart. I passed out of the room, reflecting that it would not be easy to circumvent her. As I stood in the sala again I saw that Miss Tita had followed me and I supposed that as her aunt had neglected to suggest that I should take a look at my quarters it was her purpose to repair the omission. But she made no such suggestion; she only stood there with a dim, though not a languid smile, and with an effect of irresponsible, incompetent youth which was almost comically at variance with the faded facts of her person. She was not infirm, like her aunt, but she struck me as still more helpless, because her inefficiency was

spiritual, which was not the case with Miss Bordereau's. I waited to see if she would offer to show me the rest of the house, but I did not precipitate the question, inasmuch as my plan was from this moment to spend as much of my time as possible in her society. I only observed at the end of a minute :

'I have had better fortune than I hoped. It was very kind of her to see me. Perhaps you said a good word for me.'

'It was the idea of the money,' said Miss Tita.

'And did you suggest that?'

'I told her that you would perhaps give a good deal.'

'What made you think that?'

'I told her I thought you were rich.'

'And what put that idea into your head?'

'I don't know ; the way you talked.'

'Dear me, I must talk differently now,' I declared. 'I'm sorry to say it's not the case.'

'Well,' said Miss Tita, 'I think that in Venice the *forestieri*, in general, often give a great deal for something that after all isn't much.' She appeared to make this remark with a comforting intention, to wish to remind me that if I had been extravagant I was not really foolishly singular. We walked together along the sala, and as I took its magnificent measure I said to her that I was afraid it would not form a part of my *quartiere*. Were my rooms by chance to be among those that opened into it? 'Not if you go above, on the second floor,' she answered with a little startled air, as if she had rather taken for granted I would know my proper place.

'And I infer that that's where your aunt would like me to be.'



‘She said your apartments ought to be very distinct.’

‘That certainly would be best.’ And I listened with respect while she told me that up above I was free to take whatever I liked ; that there was another staircase, but only from the floor on which we stood, and that to pass from it to the garden-story or to come up to my lodging I should have in effect to cross the great hall. This was an immense point gained ; I foresaw that it would constitute my whole leverage in my relations with the two ladies. When I asked Miss Tita how I was to manage at present to find my way up she replied with an access of that sociable shyness which constantly marked her manner.

‘Perhaps you can’t. I don’t see—unless I should go with you.’ She evidently had not thought of this before.

We ascended to the upper floor and visited a long succession of empty rooms. The best of them looked over the garden ; some of the others had a view of the blue lagoon, above the opposite rough-tiled housetops. They were all dusty and even a little disfigured with long neglect, but I saw that by spending a few hundred francs I should be able to convert three or four of them into a convenient habitation. My experiment was turning out costly, yet now that I had all but taken possession I ceased to allow this to trouble me. I mentioned to my companion a few of the things that I should put in, but she replied rather more precipitately than usual that I might do exactly what I liked ; she seemed to wish to notify me that the Misses Bordereau would take no overt interest in my proceedings. I

guessed that her aunt had instructed her to adopt this tone, and I may as well say now that I came afterwards to distinguish perfectly (as I believed) between the speeches she made on her own responsibility and those the old lady imposed upon her. She took no notice of the unswept condition of the rooms and indulged in no explanations nor apologies. I said to myself that this was a sign that Juliana and her niece (disenchanted idea!) were untidy persons, with a low Italian standard; but I afterwards recognised that a lodger who had forced an entrance had no *locus standi* as a critic. We looked out of a good many windows, for there was nothing within the rooms to look at, and still I wanted to linger. I asked her what several different objects in the prospect might be, but in no case did she appear to know. She was evidently not familiar with the view—it was as if she had not looked at it for years—and I presently saw that she was too preoccupied with something else to pretend to care for it. Suddenly she said—the remark was not suggested:

‘I don’t know whether it will make any difference to you, but the money is for me.’

‘The money?’

‘The money you are going to bring.’

‘Why, you’ll make me wish to stay here two or three years.’ I spoke as benevolently as possible, though it had begun to act on my nerves that with these women so associated with Aspern the pecuniary question should constantly come back.

‘That would be very good for me,’ she replied, smiling.

‘You put me on my honour!’



She looked as if she failed to understand this, but went on: 'She wants me to have more. She thinks she is going to die.'

'Ah, not soon, I hope!' I exclaimed, with genuine feeling. I had perfectly considered the possibility that she would destroy her papers on the day she should feel her end really approach. I believed that she would cling to them till then and I think I had an idea that she read Aspern's letters over every night or at least pressed them to her withered lips. I would have given a good deal to have a glimpse of the latter spectacle. I asked Miss Tita if the old lady were seriously ill and she replied that she was only very tired—she had lived so very, very long. That was what she said herself—she wanted to die for a change. Besides, all her friends were dead long ago; either they ought to have remained or she ought to have gone. That was another thing her aunt often said—she was not at all content.

'But people don't die when they like, do they?' Miss Tita inquired. I took the liberty of asking why, if there was actually enough money to maintain both of them, there would not be more than enough in case of her being left alone. She considered this difficult problem a moment and then she said, 'Oh, well, you know, she takes care of me. She thinks that when I'm alone I shall be a great fool, I shall not know how to manage.'

'I should have supposed rather that you took care of her. I'm afraid she is very proud.'

'Why, have you discovered that already?' Miss Tita cried, with the glimmer of an illumination in her face.

'I was shut up with her there for a considerable

time, and she struck me, she interested me extremely. It didn't take me long to make my discovery. She won't have much to say to me while I'm here.'

'No, I don't think she will,' my companion averred.

'Do you suppose she has some suspicion of me?'

Miss Tita's honest eyes gave me no sign that I had touched a mark. 'I shouldn't think so—letting you in after all so easily.'

'Oh, so easily! she has covered her risk. But where is it that one could take an advantage of her?'

'I oughtn't to tell you if I knew, ought I?'

And Miss Tita added, before I had time to reply to this, smiling dolefully, 'Do you think we have any weak points?'

'That's exactly what I'm asking. You would only have to mention them for me to respect them religiously.'

She looked at me, at this, with that air of timid but candid and even gratified curiosity with which she had confronted me from the first; and then she said, 'There is nothing to tell. We are terribly quiet. I don't know how the days pass. We have no life.'

'I wish I might think that I should bring you a little.'

'Oh, we know what we want,' she went on. 'It's all right.'

There were various things I desired to ask her: how in the world they did live; whether they had any friends or visitors, any relations in America or in other countries. But I judged such an inquiry would be premature; I must leave it to a later

chance. 'Well, don't *you* be proud,' I contented myself with saying. 'Don't hide from me altogether.'

'Oh, I must stay with my aunt,' she returned, without looking at me. And at the same moment, abruptly, without any ceremony of parting, she quitted me and disappeared, leaving me to make my own way downstairs. I remained a while longer, wandering about the bright desert (the sun was pouring in) of the old house, thinking the situation over on the spot. Not even the pattering little *serva* came to look after me and I reflected that after all this treatment showed confidence.

## IV

PERHAPS it did, but all the same, six weeks later, towards the middle of June, the moment when Mrs. Prest undertook her annual migration, I had made no measureable advance. I was obliged to confess to her that I had no results to speak of. My first step had been unexpectedly rapid, but there was no appearance that it would be followed by a second. I was a thousand miles from taking tea with my hostesses—that privilege of which, as I reminded Mrs. Prest, we both had had a vision. She reproached me with wanting boldness and I answered that even to be bold you must have an opportunity: you may push on through a breach but you can't batter down a dead wall. She answered that the breach I had already made was big enough to admit an army and accused me of wasting precious hours in whimpering in her salon when I ought to have been carrying on the struggle in the field. It is true that I went to see her very often, on the theory that it would console me (I freely expressed my discouragement) for my want of success on my own premises. But I began to perceive that it did not console me to be perpetually chaffed for my scruples, especially when I was really so vigilant; and I was rather glad when

my derisive friend closed her house for the summer. She had expected to gather amusement from the drama of my intercourse with the Misses Bordereau and she was disappointed that the intercourse, and consequently the drama, had not come off. 'They'll lead you on to your ruin,' she said before she left Venice. 'They'll get all your money without showing you a scrap.' I think I settled down to my business with more concentration after she had gone away.

It was a fact that up to that time I had not, save on a single brief occasion, had even a moment's contact with my queer hostesses. The exception had occurred when I carried them according to my promise the terrible three thousand francs. Then I found Miss Tita waiting for me in the hall, and she took the money from my hand so that I did not see her aunt. The old lady had promised to receive me, but she apparently thought nothing of breaking that vow. The money was contained in a bag of chamois leather, of respectable dimensions, which my banker had given me, and Miss Tita had to make a big fist to receive it. This she did with extreme solemnity, though I tried to treat the affair a little as a joke. It was in no jocular strain, yet it was with simplicity, that she inquired, weighing the money in her two palms: 'Don't you think it's too much?' To which I replied that that would depend upon the amount of pleasure I should get for it. Hereupon she turned away from me quickly, as she had done the day before, murmuring in a tone different from any she had used hitherto: 'Oh, pleasure, pleasure—there's no pleasure in this house!'

After this, for a long time, I never saw her, and

I wondered that the common chances of the day should not have helped us to meet. It could only be evident that she was immensely on her guard against them ; and in addition to this the house was so big that for each other we were lost in it. I used to look out for her hopefully as I crossed the sala in my comings and goings, but I was not rewarded with a glimpse of the tail of her dress. It was as if she never peeped out of her aunt's apartment. I used to wonder what she did there week after week and year after year. I had never encountered such a violent *parti pris* of seclusion ; it was more than keeping quiet—it was like hunted creatures feigning death. The two ladies appeared to have no visitors whatever and no sort of contact with the world. I judged at least that people could not have come to the house and that Miss Tita could not have gone out without my having some observation of it. I did what I disliked myself for doing (reflecting that it was only once in a way) : I questioned my servant about their habits and let him divine that I should be interested in any information he could pick up. But he picked up amazingly little for a knowing Venetian : it must be added that where there is a perpetual fast there are very few crumbs on the floor. His cleverness in other ways was sufficient, if it was not quite all that I had attributed to him on the occasion of my first interview with Miss Tita. He had helped my gondolier to bring me round a boat-load of furniture ; and when these articles had been carried to the top of the palace and distributed according to our associated wisdom he organised my household with such promptitude as was consistent with the fact that it was composed exclusively of



himself. He made me in short as comfortable as I could be with my indifferent prospects. I should have been glad if he had fallen in love with Miss Bordereau's maid or, failing this, had taken her in aversion; either event might have brought about some kind of catastrophe and a catastrophe might have led to some parley. It was my idea that she would have been sociable, and I myself on various occasions saw her flit to and fro on domestic errands, so that I was sure she was accessible. But I tasted of no gossip from that fountain, and I afterwards learned that Pasquale's affections were fixed upon an object that made him heedless of other women. This was a young lady with a powdered face, a yellow cotton gown and much leisure, who used often to come to see him. She practised, at her convenience, the art of a stringer of beads (these ornaments are made in Venice, in profusion; she had her pocket full of them and I used to find them on the floor of my apartment), and kept an eye on the maiden in the house. It was not for me of course to make the domestics tattle, and I never said a word to Miss Bordereau's cook.

It seemed to me a proof of the old lady's determination to have nothing to do with me that she should never have sent me a receipt for my three months' rent. For some days I looked out for it and then, when I had given it up, I wasted a good deal of time in wondering what her reason had been for neglecting so indispensable and familiar a form. At first I was tempted to send her a reminder, after which I relinquished the idea (against my judgment as to what was right in the particular case), on the

general ground of wishing to keep quiet. If Miss Bordereau suspected me of ulterior aims she would suspect me less if I should be businesslike, and yet I consented not to be so. It was possible she intended her omission as an impertinence, a visible irony, to show how she could overreach people who attempted to overreach her. On that hypothesis it was well to let her see that one did not notice her little tricks. The real reading of the matter, I afterwards perceived, was simply the poor old woman's desire to emphasise the fact that I was in the enjoyment of a favour as rigidly limited as it had been liberally bestowed. She had given me part of her house and now she would not give me even a morsel of paper with her name on it. Let me say that even at first this did not make me too miserable, for the whole episode was essentially delightful to me. I foresaw that I should have a summer after my own literary heart, and the sense of holding my opportunity was much greater than the sense of losing it. There could be no Venetian business without patience, and since I adored the place I was much more in the spirit of it for having laid in a large provision. That spirit kept me perpetual company and seemed to look out at me from the revived immortal face—in which all his genius shone—of the great poet who was my prompter. I had invoked him and he had come; he hovered before me half the time; it was as if his bright ghost had returned to earth to tell me that he regarded the affair as his own no less than mine and that we should see it fraternally, cheerfully to a conclusion. It was as if he had said, 'Poor dear, be easy with her; she has some natural prejudices; only give her time.



Strange as it may appear to you she was very attractive in 1820. Meanwhile are we not in Venice together, and what better place is there for the meeting of dear friends? See how it glows with the advancing summer; how the sky and the sea and the rosy air and the marble of the palaces all shimmer and melt together.' My eccentric private errand became a part of the general romance and the general glory—I felt even a mystic companionship, a moral fraternity with all those who in the past had been in the service of art. They had worked for beauty, for a devotion; and what else was I doing? That element was in everything that Jeffrey Aspern had written and I was only bringing it to the light.

I lingered in the sala when I went to and fro; I used to watch—as long as I thought decent—the door that led to Miss Bordereau's part of the house. A person observing me might have supposed I was trying to cast a spell upon it or attempting some odd experiment in hypnotism. But I was only praying it would open or thinking what treasure probably lurked behind it. I hold it singular, as I look back, that I should never have doubted for a moment that the sacred relics were there; never have failed to feel a certain joy at being under the same roof with them. After all they were under my hand—they had not escaped me yet; and they made my life continuous, in a fashion, with the illustrious life they had touched at the other end. I lost myself in this satisfaction to the point of assuming—in my quiet extravagance—that poor Miss Tita also went back, went back, as I used to phrase it. She did indeed, the gentle spinster, but not quite so

far as Jeffrey Aspern, who was simple hearsay to her, quite as he was to me. Only she had lived for years with Juliana, she had seen and handled the papers and (even though she was stupid) some esoteric knowledge had rubbed off on her. That was what the old woman represented—esoteric knowledge; and this was the idea with which my editorial heart used to thrill. It literally beat faster often, of an evening, when I had been out, as I stopped with my candle in the re-echoing hall on my way up to bed. It was as if at such a moment as that, in the stillness, after the long contradiction of the day, Miss Bordereau's secrets were in the air, the wonder of her survival more palpable. These were the acute impressions. I had them in another form, with more of a certain sort of reciprocity, during the hours that I sat in the garden looking up over the top of my book at the closed windows of my hostess. In these windows no sign of life ever appeared; it was as if, for fear of my catching a glimpse of them, the two ladies passed their days in the dark. But this only proved to me that they had something to conceal; which was what I had wished to demonstrate. Their motionless shutters became as expressive as eyes consciously closed, and I took comfort in thinking that at all events though invisible themselves they saw me between the lashes.

I made a point of spending as much time as possible in the garden, to justify the picture I had originally given of my horticultural passion. And I not only spent time, but (hang it! as I said) I spent money. As soon as I had got my rooms arranged and could give the proper thought to the matter I

surveyed the place with a clever expert and made terms for having it put in order. I was sorry to do this, for personally I liked it better as it was, with its weeds and its wild, rough tangle, its sweet, characteristic Venetian shabbiness. I had to be consistent, to keep my promise that I would smother the house in flowers. Moreover I formed this graceful project that by flowers I would make my way—I would succeed by big nosegays. I would batter the old women with lilies—I would bombard their citadel with roses. Their door would have to yield to the pressure when a mountain of carnations should be piled up against it. The place in truth had been brutally neglected. The Venetian capacity for dawdling is of the largest, and for a good many days unlimited litter was all my gardener had to show for his ministrations. There was a great digging of holes and carting about of earth, and after a while I grew so impatient that I had thoughts of sending for my bouquets to the nearest stand. But I reflected that the ladies would see through the chinks of their shutters that they must have been bought and might make up their minds from this that I was a humbug. So I composed myself and finally, though the delay was long, perceived some appearances of bloom. This encouraged me and I waited serenely enough till they multiplied. Meanwhile the real summer days arrived and began to pass, and as I look back upon them they seem to me almost the happiest of my life. I took more and more care to be in the garden whenever it was not too hot. I had an arbour arranged and a low table and an armchair put into it; and I carried out books and portfolios (I had always some business of writing in hand), and worked and waited

and mused and hoped, while the golden hours elapsed and the plants drank in the light and the inscrutable old palace turned pale and then, as the day waned, began to flush in it and my papers rustled in the wandering breeze of the Adriatic.

Considering how little satisfaction I got from it at first it is remarkable that I should not have grown more tired of wondering what mystic rites of ennui the Misses Bordereau celebrated in their darkened rooms ; whether this had always been the tenor of their life and how in previous years they had escaped elbowing their neighbours. It was clear that they must have had other habits and other circumstances ; that they must once have been young or at least middle-aged. There was no end to the questions it was possible to ask about them and no end to the answers it was not possible to frame. I had known many of my country-people in Europe and was familiar with the strange ways they were liable to take up there ; but the Misses Bordereau formed altogether a new type of the American absentee. Indeed it was plain that the American name had ceased to have any application to them—I had seen this in the ten minutes I spent in the old woman's room. You could never have said whence they came, from the appearance of either of them ; wherever it was they had long ago dropped the local accent and fashion. There was nothing in them that one recognised, and putting the question of speech aside they might have been Norwegians or Spaniards. Miss Bordereau, after all, had been in Europe nearly threequarters of a century ; it appeared by some verses addressed to her by Aspern on the occasion of his own second absence from America—verses of which Cumnor and I had after

infinite conjecture established solidly enough the date—that she was even then, as a girl of twenty, on the foreign side of the sea. There was an implication in the poem (I hope not just for the phrase) that he had come back for her sake. We had no real light upon her circumstances at that moment, any more than we had upon her origin, which we believed to be of the sort usually spoken of as modest. Cumnor had a theory that she had been a governess in some family in which the poet visited and that, in consequence of her position, there was from the first something unavowed, or rather something positively clandestine, in their relations. I on the other hand had hatched a little romance according to which she was the daughter of an artist, a painter or a sculptor, who had left the western world when the century was fresh, to study in the ancient schools. It was essential to my hypothesis that this amiable man should have lost his wife, should have been poor and unsuccessful and should have had a second daughter, of a disposition quite different from Juliana's. It was also indispensable that he should have been accompanied to Europe by these young ladies and should have established himself there for the remainder of a struggling, saddened life. There was a further implication that Miss Bordereau had had in her youth a perverse and adventurous, albeit a generous and fascinating character, and that she had passed through some singular vicissitudes. By what passions had she been ravaged, by what sufferings had she been blanched, what store of memories had she laid away for the monotonous future?

I asked myself these things as I sat spinning theories about her in my arbour and the bees droned



in the flowers. It was incontestable that, whether for right or for wrong, most readers of certain of Aspern's poem's (poems not as ambiguous as the sonnets—scarcely more divine, I think—of Shakespeare) had taken for granted that Juliana had not always adhered to the steep footway of renunciation. There hovered about her name a perfume of reckless passion, an intimation that she had not been exactly as the respectable young person in general. Was this a sign that her singer had betrayed her, had given her away, as we say nowadays, to posterity? Certain it is that it would have been difficult to put one's finger on the passage in which her fair fame suffered an imputation. Moreover was not any fame fair enough that was so sure of duration and was associated with works immortal through their beauty? It was a part of my idea that the young lady had had a foreign lover (and an unedifying tragical rupture) before her meeting with Jeffrey Aspern. She had lived with her father and sister in a queer old-fashioned, expatriated, artistic Bohemia, in the days when the æsthetic was only the academic and the painters who knew the best models for a *contadina* and *pifferaro* wore peaked hats and long hair. It was a society less furnished than the coteries of to-day (in its ignorance of the wonderful chances, the opportunities of the early bird, with which its path was strewn), with tatters of old stuff and fragments of old crockery; so that Miss Bordereau appeared not to have picked up or have inherited many objects of importance. There was no enviable *bric-à-brac*, with its provoking legend of cheapness, in the room in which I had seen her. Such a fact as that suggested bareness, but none the less it worked happily into the

sentimental interest I had always taken in the early movements of my countrymen as visitors to Europe. When Americans went abroad in 1820 there was something romantic, almost heroic in it, as compared with the perpetual ferryings of the present hour, when photography and other conveniences have annihilated surprise. Miss Bordereau sailed with her family on a tossing brig, in the days of long voyages and sharp differences ; she had her emotions on the top of yellow diligences, passed the night at inns where she dreamed of travellers' tales, and was struck, on reaching the eternal city, with the elegance of Roman pearls and scarfs. There was something touching to me in all that and my imagination frequently went back to the period. If Miss Bordereau carried it there of course Jeffrey Aspern at other times had done so a great deal more. It was a much more important fact, if one were looking at his genius critically, that he had lived in the days before the general transfusion. It had happened to me to regret that he had known Europe at all ; I should have liked to see what he would have written without that experience, by which he had incontestably been enriched. But as his fate had ordered otherwise I went with him—I tried to judge how the old world would have struck him. It was not only there, however, that I watched him ; the relations he had entertained with the new had even a livelier interest. His own country after all had had most of his life, and his muse, as they said at that time, was essentially American. That was originally what I had loved him for : that at a period when our native land was nude and crude and provincial, when the famous 'atmosphere' it is supposed to lack was not even

missed, when literature was lonely there and art and form almost impossible, he had found means to live and write like one of the first ; to be free and general and not at all afraid ; to feel, understand and express everything.



## V

I WAS seldom at home in the evening, for when I attempted to occupy myself in my apartments the lamplight brought in a swarm of noxious insects, and it was too hot for closed windows. Accordingly I spent the late hours either on the water (the moonlight of Venice is famous), or in the splendid square which serves as a vast forecourt to the strange old basilica of Saint Mark. I sat in front of Florian's *café*, eating ices, listening to music, talking with acquaintances: the traveller will remember how the immense cluster of tables and little chairs stretches like a promontory into the smooth lake of the Piazza. The whole place, of a summer's evening, under the stars and with all the lamps, all the voices and light footsteps on marble (the only sounds of the arcades that enclose it), is like an open-air saloon dedicated to cooling drinks and to a still finer degustation—that of the exquisite impressions received during the day. When I did not prefer to keep mine to myself there was always a stray tourist, disencumbered of his Bädeler, to discuss them with, or some domesticated painter rejoicing in the return of the season of strong effects. The wonderful church, with its low domes and bristling embroideries,

the mystery of its mosaic and sculpture, looked ghostly in the tempered gloom, and the sea-breeze passed between the twin columns of the Piazzetta, the lintels of a door no longer guarded, as gently as if a rich curtain were swaying there. I used sometimes on these occasions to think of the Misses Bordereau and of the pity of their being shut up in apartments which in the Venetian July even Venetian vastness did not prevent from being stuffy. Their life seemed miles away from the life of the Piazza, and no doubt it was really too late to make the austere Juliana change her habits. But poor Miss Tita would have enjoyed one of Florian's ices, I was sure; sometimes I even had thoughts of carrying one home to her. Fortunately my patience bore fruit and I was not obliged to do anything so ridiculous.

One evening about the middle of July I came in earlier than usual—I forget what chance had led to this—and instead of going up to my quarters made my way into the garden. The temperature was very high; it was such a night as one would gladly have spent in the open air and I was in no hurry to go to bed. I had floated home in my gondola, listening to the slow splash of the oar in the narrow dark canals, and now the only thought that solicited me was the vague reflection that it would be pleasant to recline at one's length in the fragrant darkness on a garden bench. The odour of the canal was doubtless at the bottom of that aspiration and the breath of the garden, as I entered it, gave consistency to my purpose. It was delicious—just such an air as must have trembled with Romeo's vows when he stood among the flowers and raised his arms to his mistress's balcony. I looked at the windows of the palace

to see if by chance the example of Verona (Verona being not far off) had been followed ; but everything was dim, as usual, and everything was still. Juliana, on summer nights in her youth, might have murmured down from open windows at Jeffrey Aspern, but Miss Tita was not a poet's mistress any more than I was a poet. This however did not prevent my gratification from being great as I became aware on reaching the end of the garden that Miss Tita was seated in my little bower. At first I only made out an indistinct figure, not in the least counting on such an overture from one of my hostesses ; it even occurred to me that some sentimental maidservant had stolen in to keep a tryst with her sweetheart. I was going to turn away, not to frighten her, when the figure rose to its height and I recognised Miss Bordereau's niece. I must do myself the justice to say that I did not wish to frighten her either, and much as I had longed for some such accident I should have been capable of retreating. It was as if I had laid a trap for her by coming home earlier than usual and adding to that eccentricity by creeping into the garden. As she rose she spoke to me, and then I reflected that perhaps, secure in my almost inveterate absence, it was her nightly practice to take a lonely airing. There was no trap, in truth, because I had had no suspicion. At first I took for granted that the words she uttered expressed discomfiture at my arrival ; but as she repeated them—I had not caught them clearly—I had the surprise of hearing her say, 'Oh, dear, I'm so very glad you've come!' She and her aunt had in common the property of unexpected speeches. She came out of the arbour almost as if she were going to throw herself into my arms.

I hasten to add that she did nothing of the kind ; she did not even shake hands with me. It was a gratification to her to see me and presently she told me why—because she was nervous when she was out-of-doors at night alone. The plants and bushes looked so strange in the dark, and there were all sorts of queer sounds—she could not tell what they were—like the noises of animals. She stood close to me, looking about her with an air of greater security but without any demonstration of interest in me as an individual. Then I guessed that nocturnal prowlings were not in the least her habit, and I was also reminded (I had been struck with the circumstance in talking with her before I took possession) that it was impossible to over-estimate her simplicity.

‘You speak as if you were lost in the backwoods,’ I said, laughing. ‘How you manage to keep out of this charming place when you have only three steps to take to get into it, is more than I have yet been able to discover. You hide away mighty well so long as I am on the premises, I know ; but I had a hope that you peeped out a little at other times. You and your poor aunt are worse off than Carmelite nuns in their cells. Should you mind telling me how you exist without air, without exercise, without any sort of human contact ? I don’t see how you carry on the common business of life.’

She looked at me as if I were talking some strange tongue and her answer was so little of an answer that I was considerably irritated. ‘We go to bed very early—earlier than you would believe.’ I was on the point of saying that this only deepened the mystery when she gave me some relief by adding,

‘Before you came we were not so private. But I never have been out at night.’

‘Never in these fragrant alleys, blooming here under your nose?’

‘Ah,’ said Miss Tita, ‘they were never nice till now!’ There was an unmistakable reference in this and a flattering comparison, so that it seemed to me I had gained a small advantage. As it would help me to follow it up to establish a sort of grievance I asked her why, since she thought my garden nice, she had never thanked me in any way for the flowers I had been sending up in such quantities for the previous three weeks. I had not been discouraged—there had been, as she would have observed, a daily armful; but I had been brought up in the common forms and a word of recognition now and then would have touched me in the right place.

‘Why I didn’t know they were for me!’

‘They were for both of you. Why should I make a difference?’

Miss Tita reflected as if she might be thinking of a reason for that, but she failed to produce one. Instead of this she asked abruptly, ‘Why in the world do you want to know us?’

‘I ought after all to make a difference,’ I replied. ‘That question is your aunt’s; it isn’t yours. You wouldn’t ask it if you hadn’t been put up to it.’

‘She didn’t tell me to ask you,’ Miss Tita replied, without confusion; she was the oddest mixture of the shrinking and the direct.

‘Well, she has often wondered about it herself and expressed her wonder to you. She has insisted on it, so that she has put the idea into your head that I am unsufferably pushing. Upon my word I

think I have been very discreet. And how completely your aunt must have lost every tradition of sociability, to see anything out of the way in the idea that respectable intelligent people, living as we do under the same roof, should occasionally exchange a remark! What could be more natural? We are of the same country and we have at least some of the same tastes, since, like you, I am intensely fond of Venice.'

My interlocutress appeared incapable of grasping more than one clause in any proposition, and she declared quickly, eagerly, as if she were answering my whole speech: 'I am not in the least fond of Venice. I should like to go far away!'

'Has she always kept you back so?' I went on, to show her that I could be as irrelevant as herself.

'She told me to come out to-night; she has told me very often,' said Miss Tita. 'It is I who wouldn't come. I don't like to leave her.'

'Is she too weak, is she failing?' I demanded, with more emotion, I think, than I intended to show. I judged this by the way her eyes rested upon me in the darkness. It embarrassed me a little, and to turn the matter off I continued genially: 'Do let us sit down together comfortably somewhere and you will tell me all about her.'

Miss Tita made no resistance to this. We found a bench less secluded, less confidential, as it were, than the one in the harbour; and we were still sitting there when I heard midnight ring out from those clear bells of Venice which vibrate with a solemnity of their own over the lagoon and hold the air so much more than the chimes of other places. We were together more than an hour and our interview gave, as it struck me, a great lift to my undertaking.



Miss Tita accepted the situation without a protest ; she had avoided me for three months, yet now she treated me almost as if these three months had made me an old friend. If I had chosen I might have inferred from this that though she had avoided me she had given a good deal of consideration to doing so. She paid no attention to the flight of time—never worried at my keeping her so long away from her aunt. She talked freely, answering questions and asking them and not even taking advantage of certain longish pauses with which they inevitably alternated to say she thought she had better go in. It was almost as if she were waiting for something—something I might say to her—and intended to give me my opportunity. I was the more struck by this as she told me that her aunt had been less well for a good many days and in a way that was rather new. She was weaker ; at moments it seemed as if she had no strength at all ; yet more than ever before she wished to be left alone. That was why she had told her to come out—not even to remain in her own room, which was alongside ; she said her niece irritated her, made her nervous. She sat still for hours together, as if she were asleep ; she had always done that, musing and dozing ; but at such times formerly she gave at intervals some small sign of life, of interest, liking her companion to be near her with her work. Miss Tita confided to me that at present her aunt was so motionless that she sometimes feared she was dead ; moreover she took hardly any food—one couldn't see what she lived on. The great thing was that she still on most days got up ; the serious job was to dress her, to wheel her out of her bedroom. She clung to as many of her old habits as possible and

she had always, little company as they had received for years, made a point of sitting in the parlour.

I scarcely knew what to think of all this—of Miss Tita's sudden conversion to sociability and of the strange circumstance that the more the old lady appeared to decline toward her end the less she should desire to be looked after. The story did not hang together, and I even asked myself whether it were not a trap laid for me, the result of a design to make me show my hand. I could not have told why my companions (as they could only by courtesy be called) should have this purpose—why they should try to trip up so lucrative a lodger. At any rate I kept on my guard, so that Miss Tita should not have occasion again to ask me if I had an *arrière-pensée*. Poor woman, before we parted for the night my mind was at rest as to *her* capacity for entertaining one.

She told me more about their affairs than I had hoped; there was no need to be prying, for it evidently drew her out simply to feel that I listened, that I cared. She ceased wondering why I cared, and at last, as she spoke of the brilliant life they had led years before, she almost chattered. It was Miss Tita who judged it brilliant; she said that when they first came to live in Venice, years and years before (I saw that her mind was essentially vague about dates and the order in which events had occurred), there was scarcely a week that they had not some visitor or did not make some delightful *passaggio* in the city. They had seen all the curiosities; they had even been to the Lido in a boat (she spoke as if I might think there was a way on foot); they had had a collation there, brought in three



baskets and spread out on the grass. I asked her what people they had known and she said, Oh ! very nice ones—the Cavaliere Bombicci and the Contessa Altemura, with whom they had had a great friendship. Also English people—the Churtons and the Goldies and Mrs. Stock-Stock, whom they had loved dearly ; she was dead and gone, poor dear. That was the case with most of their pleasant circle (this expression was Miss Tita's own), though a few were left, which was a wonder considering how they had neglected them. She mentioned the names of two or three Venetian old women ; of a certain doctor, very clever, who was so kind—he came as a friend, he had really given up practice ; of the *avvocato* Pochintesta, who wrote beautiful poems and had addressed one to her aunt. These people came to see them without fail every year, usually at the *capo d'anno*, and of old her aunt used to make them some little present—her aunt and she together : small things that she, Miss Tita, made herself, like paper lamp-shades or mats for the decanters of wine at dinner or those woollen things that in cold weather were worn on the wrists. The last few years there had not been many presents ; she could not think what to make and her aunt had lost her interest and never suggested. But the people came all the same ; if the Venetians liked you once they liked you for ever.

There was something affecting in the good faith of this sketch of former social glories ; the picnic at the Lido had remained vivid through the ages and poor Miss Tita evidently was of the impression that she had had a brilliant youth. She had in fact had a glimpse of the Venetian world in its gossiping, home-keeping, parsimonious, professional walks ; for

I observed for the first time that she had acquired by contact something of the trick of the familiar, soft-sounding, almost infantile speech of the place. I judged that she had imbibed this invertebrate dialect, from the natural way the names of things and people—mostly purely local—rose to her lips. If she knew little of what they represented she knew still less of anything else. Her aunt had drawn in—her failing interest in the table-mats and lamp-shades was a sign of that—and she had not been able to mingle in society or to entertain it alone; so that the matter of her reminiscences struck one as an old world altogether. If she had not been so decent her references would have seemed to carry one back to the queer rococo Venice of Casanova. I found myself falling into the error of thinking of her too as one of Jeffrey Aspern's contemporaries; this came from her having so little in common with my own. It was possible, I said to myself, that she had not even heard of him; it might very well be that Juliana had not cared to lift even for her the veil that covered the temple of her youth. In this case she perhaps would not know of the existence of the papers, and I welcomed that presumption—it made me feel more safe with her—until I remembered that we had believed the letter of disavowal received by Cumnor to be in the handwriting of the niece. If it had been dictated to her she had of course to know what it was about; yet after all the effect of it was to repudiate the idea of any connection with the poet. I held it probable at all events that Miss Tita had not read a word of his poetry. Moreover if, with her companion, she had always escaped the interviewer there was little occasion for her having got it

into her head that people were 'after' the letters. People had not been after them, inasmuch as they had not heard of them ; and Cumnor's fruitless feeler would have been a solitary accident.

When midnight sounded Miss Tita got up ; but she stopped at the door of the house only after she had wandered two or three times with me round the garden. 'When shall I see you again?' I asked, before she went in ; to which she replied with promptness that she should like to come out the next night. She added however that she should not come—she was so far from doing everything she liked.

'You might do a few things that *I* like,' I said with a sigh.

'Oh, you—I don't believe you!' she murmured, at this, looking at me with her simple solemnity.

'Why don't you believe me?'

'Because I don't understand you.'

'That is just the sort of occasion to have faith.' I could not say more, though I should have liked to, as I saw that I only mystified her ; for I had no wish to have it on my conscience that I might pass for having made love to her. Nothing less should I have seemed to do had I continued to beg a lady to 'believe in me' in an Italian garden on a mid-summer night. There was some merit in my scruples, for Miss Tita lingered and lingered : I perceived that she felt that she should not really soon come down again and wished therefore to protract the present. She insisted too on making the talk between us personal to ourselves ; and altogether her behaviour was such as would have been possible only to a completely innocent woman.

'I shall like the flowers better now that I know they are also meant for me.'

'How could you have doubted it? If you will tell me the kind you like best I will send a double lot of them.'

'Oh, I like them all best!' Then she went on, familiarly: 'Shall you study—shall you read and write—when you go up to your rooms?'

'I don't do that at night, at this season. The lamplight brings in the animals.'

'You might have known that when you came.'

'I did know it!'

'And in winter do you work at night?'

'I read a good deal, but I don't often write.' She listened as if these details had a rare interest, and suddenly a temptation quite at variance with the prudence I had been teaching myself associated itself with her plain, mild face. Ah yes, she was safe and I could make her safer! It seemed to me from one moment to another that I could not wait longer—that I really must take a sounding. So I went on: 'In general before I go to sleep—very often in bed (it's a bad habit, but I confess to it), I read some great poet. In nine cases out of ten it's a volume of Jeffrey Aspern.'

I watched her well as I pronounced that name but I saw nothing wonderful. Why should I indeed—was not Jeffrey Aspern the property of the human race?

'Oh, we read him—we *have* read him,' she quietly replied.

'He is my poet of poets—I know him almost by heart.'

For an instant Miss Tita hesitated; then her sociability was too much for her.

'Oh, by heart—that's nothing!' she murmured, smiling. 'My aunt used to know him—to know him'—she paused an instant and I wondered what she was going to say—'to know him as a visitor.'

'As a visitor?' I repeated, staring.

'He used to call on her and take her out.'

I continued to stare. 'My dear lady, he died a hundred years ago!'

'Well,' she said, mirthfully, 'my aunt is a hundred and fifty.'

'Mercy on us!' I exclaimed; 'why didn't you tell me before? I should like so to ask her about him.'

'She wouldn't care for that—she wouldn't tell you,' Miss Tita replied.

'I don't care what she cares for! She *must* tell me—it's not a chance to be lost.'

'Oh, you should have come twenty years ago: then she still talked about him.'

'And what did she say?' I asked, eagerly.

'I don't know—that he liked her immensely.'

'And she—didn't she like him?'

'She said he was a god.' Miss Tita gave me this information flatly, without expression; her tone might have made it a piece of trivial gossip. But it stirred me deeply as she dropped the words into the summer night; it seemed such a direct testimony.

'Fancy, fancy!' I murmured. And then, 'Tell me this, please—has she got a portrait of him? They are distressingly rare.'

'A portrait? I don't know,' said Miss Tita; and now there was discomfiture in her face. 'Well, good-night!' she added; and she turned into the house.

I accompanied her into the wide, dusky, stone-paved passage which on the ground floor corresponded with our grand sala. It opened at one end into the garden, at the other upon the canal, and was lighted now only by the small lamp that was always left for me to take up as I went to bed. An extinguished candle which Miss Tita apparently had brought down with her stood on the same table with it. 'Good-night, good-night!' I replied, keeping beside her as she went to get her light. 'Surely you would know, shouldn't you, if she had one?'

'If she had what?' the poor lady asked, looking at me queerly over the flame of her candle.

'A portrait of the god. I don't know what I wouldn't give to see it.'

'I don't know what she has got. She keeps her things locked up.' And Miss Tita went away, toward the staircase, with the sense evidently that she had said too much.

I let her go—I wished not to frighten her—and I contented myself with remarking that Miss Bordereau would not have locked up such a glorious possession as that—a thing a person would be proud of and hang up in a prominent place on the parlour-wall. Therefore of course she had not any portrait. Miss Tita made no direct answer to this and candle in hand, with her back to me, ascended two or three stairs. Then she stopped short and turned round, looking at me across the dusky space.

'Do you write—do you write?' There was a shake in her voice—she could scarcely bring out what she wanted to ask.

'Do I write? Oh, don't speak of my writing on the same day with Aspern's!'



‘Do you write about *him*—do you pry into his life?’

‘Ah, that’s your aunt’s question; it can’t be yours!’ I said, in a tone of slightly wounded sensibility.

‘All the more reason then that you should answer it. Do you, please?’

I thought I had allowed for the falsehoods I should have to tell; but I found that in fact when it came to the point I had not. Besides, now that I had an opening there was a kind of relief in being frank. Lastly (it was perhaps fanciful, even fatuous), I guessed that Miss Tita personally would not in the last resort be less my friend. So after a moment’s hesitation I answered, ‘Yes, I have written about him and I am looking for more material. In heaven’s name have you got any?’

‘*Santo Dio!*’ she exclaimed, without heeding my question; and she hurried upstairs and out of sight. I might count upon her in the last resort, but for the present she was visibly alarmed. The proof of it was that she began to hide again, so that for a fortnight I never beheld her. I found my patience ebbing and after four or five days of this I told the gardener to stop the flowers.



## VI

ONE afternoon, as I came down from my quarters to go out, I found Miss Tita in the sala: it was our first encounter on that ground since I had come to the house. She put on no air of being there by accident; there was an ignorance of such arts in her angular, diffident directness. That I might be quite sure she was waiting for me she informed me of the fact and told me that Miss Bordereau wished to see me: she would take me into the room at that moment if I had time. If I had been late for a love-tryst I would have stayed for this, and I quickly signified that I should be delighted to wait upon the old lady. 'She wants to talk with you—to know you,' Miss Tita said, smiling as if she herself appreciated that idea; and she led me to the door of her aunt's apartment. I stopped her a moment before she had opened it, looking at her with some curiosity. I told her that this was a great satisfaction to me and a great honour; but all the same I should like to ask what had made Miss Bordereau change so suddenly. It was only the other day that she wouldn't suffer me near her. Miss Tita was not embarrassed by my question; she had as many little unexpected serenities as if she told fibs, but the odd

part of them was that they had on the contrary their source in her truthfulness. 'Oh, my aunt changes,' she answered; 'it's so terribly dull—I suppose she's tired.'

'But you told me that she wanted more and more to be alone.'

Poor Miss Tita coloured, as if she found me over-insistent. 'Well, if you don't believe she wants to see you—I haven't invented it! I think people often are capricious when they are very old.'

'That's perfectly true. I only wanted to be clear as to whether you have repeated to her what I told you the other night.'

'What you told me?'

'About Jeffrey Aspern—that I am looking for materials.'

'If I had told her do you think she would have sent for you?'

'That's exactly what I want to know. If she wants to keep him to herself she might have sent for me to tell me so.'

'She won't speak of him,' said Miss Tita. Then as she opened the door she added in a lower tone, 'I have told her nothing.'

The old woman was sitting in the same place in which I had seen her last, in the same position, with the same mystifying bandage over her eyes. Her welcome was to turn her almost invisible face to me and show me that while she sat silent she saw me clearly. I made no motion to shake hands with her; I felt too well on this occasion that that was out of place for ever. It had been sufficiently enjoined upon me that she was too sacred for that sort of reciprocity—too venerable to touch. There was something

so grim in her aspect (it was partly the accident of her green shade), as I stood there to be measured, that I ceased on the spot to feel any doubt as to her knowing my secret, though I did not in the least suspect that Miss Tita had not just spoken the truth. She had not betrayed me, but the old woman's brooding instinct had served her; she had turned me over and over in the long, still hours and she had guessed. The worst of it was that she looked terribly like an old woman who at a pinch would burn her papers. Miss Tita pushed a chair forward, saying to me, 'This will be a good place for you to sit.' As I took possession of it I asked after Miss Bordereau's health; expressed the hope that in spite of the very hot weather it was satisfactory. She replied that it was good enough—good enough; that it was a great thing to be alive.

'Oh, as to that, it depends upon what you compare it with!' I exclaimed, laughing.

'I don't compare—I don't compare. If I did that I should have given everything up long ago.'

I liked to think that this was a subtle allusion to the rapture she had known in the society of Jeffrey Aspern—though it was true that such an allusion would have accorded ill with the wish I imputed to her to keep him buried in her soul. What it accorded with was my constant conviction that no human being had ever had a more delightful social gift than his, and what it seemed to convey was that nothing in the world was worth speaking of if one pretended to speak of that. But one did not! Miss Tita sat down beside her aunt, looking as if she had reason to believe some very remarkable conversation would come off between us.

‘It’s about the beautiful flowers,’ said the old lady; ‘you sent us so many—I ought to have thanked you for them before. But I don’t write letters and I receive only at long intervals.’

She had not thanked me while the flowers continued to come, but she departed from her custom so far as to send for me as soon as she began to fear that they would not come any more. I noted this; I remembered what an acquisitive propensity she had shown when it was a question of extracting gold from me, and I privately rejoiced at the happy thought I had had in suspending my tribute. She had missed it and she was willing to make a concession to bring it back. At the first sign of this concession I could only go to meet her. ‘I am afraid you have not had many, of late, but they shall begin again immediately—to-morrow, to-night.’

‘Oh, do send us some to-night!’ Miss Tita cried, as if it were an immense circumstance.

‘What else should you do with them? It isn’t a manly taste to make a bower of your room,’ the old woman remarked.

‘I don’t make a bower of my room, but I am exceedingly fond of growing flowers, of watching their ways. There is nothing unmanly in that: it has been the amusement of philosophers, of statesmen in retirement; even I think of great captains.’

‘I suppose you know you can sell them—those you don’t use,’ Miss Bordereau went on. ‘I dare say they wouldn’t give you much for them; still, you could make a bargain.’

‘Oh, I have never made a bargain, as you ought to know. My gardener disposes of them and I ask no questions.’

‘I would ask a few, I can promise you!’ said Miss Bordereau; and it was the first time I had heard her laugh. I could not get used to the idea that this vision of pecuniary profit was what drew out the divine Juliana most.

‘Come into the garden yourself and pick them; come as often as you like; come every day. They are all for you,’ I pursued, addressing Miss Tita and carrying off this veracious statement by treating it as an innocent joke. ‘I can’t imagine why she doesn’t come down,’ I added, for Miss Bordereau’s benefit.

‘You must make her come; you must come up and fetch her,’ said the old woman, to my stupefaction. ‘That odd thing you have made in the corner would be a capital place for her to sit.’

The allusion to my arbour was irreverent; it confirmed the impression I had already received that there was a flicker of impertinence in Miss Bordereau’s talk, a strange mocking lambency which must have been a part of her adventurous youth and which had outlived passions and faculties. None the less I asked, ‘Wouldn’t it be possible for you to come down there yourself? Wouldn’t it do you good to sit there in the shade, in the sweet air?’

‘Oh, sir, when I move out of this it won’t be to sit in the air, and I’m afraid that any that may be stirring around me won’t be particularly sweet! It will be a very dark shade indeed. But that won’t be just yet,’ Miss Bordereau continued, cannily, as if to correct any hopes that this courageous allusion to the last receptacle of her mortality might lead me to entertain. ‘I have sat here many a day and I have had enough of arbours in my time. But I’m not afraid to wait till I’m called.’

Miss Tita had expected some interesting talk, but perhaps she found it less genial on her aunt's side (considering that I had been sent for with a civil intention) than she had hoped. As if to give the conversation a turn that would put our companion in a light more favourable she said to me, 'Didn't I tell you the other night that she had sent me out? You see that I can do what I like!'

'Do you pity her—do you teach her to pity herself?' Miss Bordereau demanded, before I had time to answer this appeal. 'She has a much easier life than I had when I was her age.'

'You must remember that it has been quite open to me to think you rather inhuman.'

'Inhuman? That's what the poets used to call the women a hundred years ago. Don't try that; you won't do as well as they!' Juliana declared. 'There is no more poetry in the world—that I know of at least. But I won't bandy words with you,' she pursued, and I well remember the old-fashioned, artificial sound she gave to the speech. 'You have made me talk, talk! It isn't good for me at all.' I got up at this and told her I would take no more of her time; but she detained me to ask, 'Do you remember, the day I saw you about the rooms, that you offered us the use of your gondola?' And when I assented, promptly, struck again with her disposition to make a 'good thing' of being there and wondering what she now had in her eye, she broke out, 'Why don't you take that girl out in it and show her the place?'

'Oh dear aunt, what do you want to do with me?' cried the 'girl,' with a piteous quaver. 'I know all about the place!'



‘Well then, go with him as a cicerone!’ said Miss Bordereau, with an effect of something like cruelty in her implacable power of retort—an incongruous suggestion that she was a sarcastic, profane, cynical old woman. ‘Haven’t we heard that there have been all sorts of changes in all these years? You ought to see them and at your age (I don’t mean because you’re so young), you ought to take the chances that come. You’re old enough, my dear, and this gentleman won’t hurt you. He will show you the famous sunsets, if they still go on—*do* they go on? The sun set for me so long ago. But that’s not a reason. Besides, I shall never miss you; you think you are too important. Take her to the Piazza; it used to be very pretty,’ Miss Bordereau continued, addressing herself to me. ‘What have they done with the funny old church? I hope it hasn’t tumbled down. Let her look at the shops; she may take some money, she may buy what she likes.’

Poor Miss Tita had got up, discountenanced and helpless, and as we stood there before her aunt it would certainly have seemed to a spectator of the scene that the old woman was amusing herself at our expense. Miss Tita protested, in a confusion of exclamations and murmurs; but I lost no time in saying that if she would do me the honour to accept the hospitality of my boat I would engage that she should not be bored. Or if she did not want so much of my company the boat itself, with the gondolier, was at her service; he was a capital oar and she might have every confidence. Miss Tita, without definitely answering this speech, looked away from me, out of the window, as if she were going to cry; and I remarked that once we had Miss Bordereau’s



approval we could easily come to an understanding. We would take an hour, whichever she liked, one of the very next days. As I made my obeisance to the old lady I asked her if she would kindly permit me to see her again.

For a moment she said nothing; then she inquired, 'Is it very necessary to your happiness?'

'It diverts me more than I can say.'

'You are wonderfully civil. Don't you know it almost kills *me*?'

'How can I believe that when I see you more animated, more brilliant than when I came in?'

'That is very true, aunt,' said Miss Tita. 'I think it does you good.'

'Isn't it touching, the solicitude we each have that the other shall enjoy herself?' sneered Miss Bordereau. 'If you think me brilliant to-day you don't know what you are talking about; you have never seen an agreeable woman. Don't try to pay me a compliment; I have been spoiled,' she went on. 'My door is shut, but you may sometimes knock.'

With this she dismissed me and I left the room. The latch closed behind me, but Miss Tita, contrary to my hope, had remained within. I passed slowly across the hall and before taking my way downstairs I waited a little. My hope was answered; after a minute Miss Tita followed me. 'That's a delightful idea about the Piazza,' I said. 'When will you go—to-night, to-morrow?'

She had been disconcerted, as I have mentioned, but I had already perceived and I was to observe again that when Miss Tita was embarrassed she did not (as most women would have done) turn away

from you and try to escape, but came closer, as it were, with a deprecating, clinging appeal to be spared, to be protected. Her attitude was perpetually a sort of prayer for assistance, for explanation; and yet no woman in the world could have been less of a comedian. From the moment you were kind to her she depended on you absolutely; her self-consciousness dropped from her and she took the greatest intimacy, the innocent intimacy which was the only thing she could conceive, for granted. She told me she did not know what had got into her aunt; she had changed so quickly, she had got some idea. I replied that she must find out what the idea was and then let me know; we would go and have an ice together at Florian's and she should tell me while we listened to the band.

'Oh, it will take me a long time to find out!' she said, rather ruefully; and she could promise me this satisfaction neither for that night nor for the next. I was patient now, however, for I felt that I had only to wait; and in fact at the end of the week, one lovely evening after dinner, she stepped into my gondola, to which in honour of the occasion I had attached a second oar.

We swept in the course of five minutes into the Grand Canal; whereupon she uttered a murmur of ecstasy as fresh as if she had been a tourist just arrived. She had forgotten how splendid the great water-way looked on a clear, hot summer evening, and how the sense of floating between marble palaces and reflected lights disposed the mind to sympathetic talk. We floated long and far, and though Miss Tita gave no high-pitched voice to her satisfaction I felt that she surrendered herself. She was more than

pleased, she was transported ; the whole thing was an immense liberation. The gondola moved with slow strokes, to give her time to enjoy it, and she listened to the splash of the oars, which grew louder and more musically liquid as we passed into narrow canals, as if it were a revelation of Venice. When I asked her how long it was since she had been in a boat she answered, 'Oh, I don't know ; a long time—not since my aunt began to be ill.' This was not the only example she gave me of her extreme vagueness about the previous years and the line which marked off the period when Miss Bordereau flourished. I was not at liberty to keep her out too long, but we took a considerable *giro* before going to the Piazza. I asked her no questions, keeping the conversation on purpose away from her domestic situation and the things I wanted to know ; I poured treasures of information about Venice into her ears, described Florence and Rome, discoursed to her on the charms and advantages of travel. She reclined, receptive, on the deep leather cushions, turned her eyes conscientiously to everything I pointed out to her, and never mentioned to me till some time afterwards that she might be supposed to know Florence better than I, as she had lived there for years with Miss Bordereau. At last she asked, with the shy impatience of a child, 'Are we not really going to the Piazza? That's what I want to see!' I immediately gave the order that we should go straight ; and then we sat silent with the expectation of arrival. As some time still passed, however, she said suddenly, of her own movement, 'I have found out what is the matter with my aunt : she is afraid you will go!'

'What has put that into her head?'

‘She has had an idea you have not been happy. That is why she is different now.’

‘You mean she wants to make me happier?’

‘Well, she wants you not to go; she wants you to stay.’

‘I suppose you mean on account of the rent,’ I remarked candidly.

Miss Tita’s candour showed itself a match for my own. ‘Yes, you know; so that I shall have more.’

‘How much does she want you to have?’ I asked, laughing. ‘She ought to fix the sum, so that I may stay till it’s made up.’

‘Oh, that wouldn’t please me,’ said Miss Tita. ‘It would be unheard of, your taking that trouble.’

‘But suppose I should have my own reasons for staying in Venice?’

‘Then it would be better for you to stay in some other house.’

‘And what would your aunt say to that?’

‘She wouldn’t like it at all. But I should think you would do well to give up your reasons and go away altogether.’

‘Dear Miss Tita,’ I said, ‘it’s not so easy to give them up!’

She made no immediate answer to this, but after a moment she broke out: ‘I think I know what your reasons are!’

‘I daresay, because the other night I almost told you how I wish you would help me to make them good.’

‘I can’t do that without being false to my aunt.’

‘What do you mean, being false to her?’

‘Why, she would never consent to what you

want. She has been asked, she has been written to. It made her fearfully angry.'

'Then she *has* got papers of value?' I demanded, quickly.

'Oh, she has got everything!' sighed Miss Tita, with a curious weariness, a sudden lapse into gloom.

These words caused all my pulses to throb, for I regarded them as precious evidence. For some minutes I was too agitated to speak, and in the interval the gondola approached the Piazzetta. After we had disembarked I asked my companion whether she would rather walk round the square or go and sit at the door of the café; to which she replied that she would do whichever I liked best—I must only remember again how little time she had. I assured her there was plenty to do both, and we made the circuit of the long arcades. Her spirits revived at the sight of the bright shop-windows, and she lingered and stopped, admiring or disapproving of their contents, asking me what I thought of things, theorising about prices. My attention wandered from her; her words of a while before, 'Oh, she has got everything!' echoed so in my consciousness. We sat down at last in the crowded circle at Florian's, finding an unoccupied table among those that were ranged in the square. It was a splendid night and all the world was out-of-doors; Miss Tita could not have wished the elements more auspicious for her return to society. I saw that she enjoyed it even more than she told; she was agitated with the multitude of her impressions. She had forgotten what an attractive thing the world is, and it was coming over her that somehow she had for the best years of her life been cheated of it. This

did not make her angry ; but as she looked all over the charming scene her face had, in spite of its smile of appreciation, the flush of a sort of wounded surprise. She became silent, as if she were thinking with a secret sadness of opportunities, for ever lost, which ought to have been easy ; and this gave me a chance to say to her, ' Did you mean a while ago that your aunt has a plan of keeping me on by admitting me occasionally to her presence ? '

' She thinks it will make a difference with you if you sometimes see her. She wants you so much to stay that she is willing to make that concession. '

' And what good does she consider that I think it will do me to see her ? '

' I don't know ; she thinks it's interesting, ' said Miss Tita, simply. ' You told her you found it so. '

' So I did ; but every one doesn't think so. '

' No, of course not, or more people would try. '

' Well, if she is capable of making that reflection she is capable also of making this further one, ' I went on : ' that I must have a particular reason for not doing as others do, in spite of the interest she offers—for not leaving her alone. ' Miss Tita looked as if she failed to grasp this rather complicated proposition ; so I continued, ' If you have not told her what I said to you the other night may she not at least have guessed it ? '

' I don't know ; she is very suspicious. '

' But she has not been made so by indiscreet curiosity, by persecution ? '

' No, no ; it isn't that, ' said Miss Tita, turning on me a somewhat troubled face. ' I don't know how to say it : it's on account of something—ages ago, before I was born—in her life. '



‘Something? What sort of thing?’ I asked, as if I myself could have no idea.

‘Oh, she has never told me,’ Miss Tita answered; and I was sure she was speaking the truth.

Her extreme limpidity was almost provoking, and I felt for the moment that she would have been more satisfactory if she had been less ingenuous. ‘Do you suppose it’s something to which Jeffrey Aspern’s letters and papers—I mean the things in her possession—have reference?’

‘I daresay it is!’ my companion exclaimed, as if this were a very happy suggestion. ‘I have never looked at any of those things.’

‘None of them? Then how do you know what they are?’

‘I don’t,’ said Miss Tita, placidly. ‘I have never had them in my hands. But I have seen them when she has had them out.’

‘Does she have them out often?’

‘Not now, but she used to. She is very fond of them.’

‘In spite of their being compromising?’

‘Compromising?’ Miss Tita repeated, as if she was ignorant of the meaning of the word. I felt almost as one who corrupts the innocence of youth.

‘I mean their containing painful memories.’

‘Oh, I don’t think they are painful.’

‘You mean you don’t think they affect her reputation?’

At this a singular look came into the face of Miss Bordereau’s niece—a kind of confession of helplessness, an appeal to me to deal fairly, generously with her. I had brought her to the Piazza, placed her among charming influences, paid her an attention



she appreciated, and now I seemed to let her perceive that all this had been a bribe—a bribe to make her turn in some way against her aunt. She was of a yielding nature and capable of doing almost anything to please a person who was kind to her; but the greatest kindness of all would be not to presume too much on this. It was strange enough, as I afterwards thought, that she had not the least air of resenting my want of consideration for her aunt's character, which would have been in the worst possible taste if anything less vital (from my point of view) had been at stake. I don't think she really measured it. 'Do you mean that she did something bad?' she asked in a moment.

'Heaven forbid I should say so, and it's none of my business. Besides, if she did,' I added, laughing, 'it was in other ages, in another world. But why should she not destroy her papers?'

'Oh, she loves them too much.'

'Even now, when she may be near her end?'

Perhaps when she's sure of that she will.'

Well, Miss Tita,' I said, 'it's just what I should like you to prevent.'

'How can I prevent it?'

'Couldn't you get them away from her?'

'And give them to you?'

This put the case very crudely, though I am sure there was no irony in her intention. 'Oh, I mean that you might let me see them and look them over. It isn't for myself; there is no personal avidity in my desire. It is simply that they would be of such immense interest to the public, such immeasurable importance as a contribution to Jeffrey Aspern's history.'

She listened to me in her usual manner, as if my speech were full of reference to things she had never heard of, and I felt particularly like the reporter of a newspaper who forces his way into a house of mourning. This was especially the case when after a moment she said, 'There was a gentleman who some time ago wrote to her in very much those words. He also wanted her papers.'

'And did she answer him?' I asked, rather ashamed of myself for not having her rectitude.

'Only when he had written two or three times. He made her very angry.'

'And what did she say?'

'She said he was a devil,' Miss Tita replied, simply.

'She used that expression in her letter?'

'Oh no; she said it to me. She made me write to him.'

'And what did you say?'

'I told him there were no papers at all.'

'Ah, poor gentleman!' I exclaimed.

'I knew there were, but I wrote what she bade me.'

'Of course you had to do that. But I hope I shall not pass for a devil.'

'It will depend upon what you ask me to do for you,' said Miss Tita, smiling.

'Oh, if there is a chance of *your* thinking so my affair is in a bad way! I sha'n't ask you to steal for me, nor even to fib—for you can't fib, unless on paper. But the principal thing is this—to prevent her from destroying the papers.'

'Why, I have no control of her,' said Miss Tita. 'It's she who controls me.'

‘But she doesn’t control her own arms and legs, does she? The way she would naturally destroy her letters would be to burn them. Now she can’t burn them without fire, and she can’t get fire unless you give it to her.’

‘I have always done everything she has asked,’ my companion rejoined. ‘Besides, there’s Olimpia.’

I was on the point of saying that Olimpia was probably corruptible, but I thought it best not to sound that note. So I simply inquired if that faithful domestic could not be managed.

‘Every one can be managed by my aunt,’ said Miss Tita. And then she observed that her holiday was over; she must go home.

I laid my hand on her arm, across the table, to stay her a moment. ‘What I want of you is a general promise to help me.’

‘Oh, how can I—how can I?’ she asked, wondering and troubled. She was half surprised, half frightened at my wishing to make her play an active part.

‘This is the main thing: to watch her carefully and warn me in time, before she commits that horrible sacrilege.’

‘I can’t watch her when she makes me go out.’

‘That’s very true.’

‘And when you do too.’

‘Mercy on us; do you think she will have done anything to-night?’

‘I don’t know; she is very cunning.’

‘Are you trying to frighten me?’ I asked.

I felt this inquiry sufficiently answered when my companion murmured in a musing, almost envious way, ‘Oh, but she loves them—she loves them!’

This reflection, repeated with such emphasis, gave

me great comfort ; but to obtain more of that balm I said, 'If she shouldn't intend to destroy the objects we speak of before her death she will probably have made some disposition by will.'

'By will?'

'Hasn't she made a will for your benefit?'

'Why, she has so little to leave. That's why she likes money,' said Miss Tita.

'Might I ask, since we are really talking things over, what you and she live on?'

'On some money that comes from America, from a lawyer. He sends it every quarter. It isn't much!'

'And won't she have disposed of that?'

My companion hesitated—I saw she was blushing. 'I believe it's mine,' she said ; and the look and tone which accompanied these words betrayed so the absence of the habit of thinking of herself that I almost thought her charming. The next instant she added, 'But she had a lawyer once, ever so long ago. And some people came and signed something.'

'They were probably witnesses. And you were not asked to sign? Well then,' I argued, rapidly and hopefully, 'it is because you are the legatee ; she has left all her documents to you!'

'If she has it's with very strict conditions,' Miss Tita responded, rising quickly, while the movement gave the words a little character of decision. They seemed to imply that the bequest would be accompanied with a command that the articles bequeathed should remain concealed from every inquisitive eye and that I was very much mistaken if I thought she was the person to depart from an injunction so solemn.

‘Oh, of course you will have to abide by the terms,’ I said ; and she uttered nothing to mitigate the severity of this conclusion. None the less, later, just before we disembarked at her own door, on our return, which had taken place almost in silence, she said to me abruptly, ‘I will do what I can to help you.’ I was grateful for this—it was very well so far as it went ; but it did not keep me from remembering that night in a worried waking hour that I now had her word for it to reinforce my own impression that the old woman was very cunning.

## VII

THE fear of what this side of her character might have led her to do made me nervous for days afterwards. I waited for an intimation from Miss Tita ; I almost figured to myself that it was her duty to keep me informed, to let me know definitely whether or no Miss Bordereau had sacrificed her treasures. But as she gave no sign I lost patience and determined to judge so far as was possible with my own senses. I sent late one afternoon to ask if I might pay the ladies a visit, and my servant came back with surprising news. Miss Bordereau could be approached without the least difficulty ; she had been moved out into the sala and was sitting by the window that overlooked the garden. I descended and found this picture correct ; the old lady had been wheeled forth into the world and had a certain air, which came mainly perhaps from some brighter element in her dress, of being prepared again to have converse with it. It had not yet, however, begun to flock about her ; she was perfectly alone and, though the door leading to her own quarters stood open, I had at first no glimpse of Miss Tita. The window at which she sat had the afternoon shade and, one of the shutters having been pushed back, she could see

the pleasant garden, where the summer sun had by this time dried up too many of the plants—she could see the yellow light and the long shadows.

‘Have you come to tell me that you will take the rooms for six months more?’ she asked, as I approached her, startling me by something coarse in her cupidity almost as much as if she had not already given me a specimen of it. Juliana’s desire to make our acquaintance lucrative had been, as I have sufficiently indicated, a false note in my image of the woman who had inspired a great poet with immortal lines ; but I may say here definitely that I recognised after all that it behoved me to make a large allowance for her. It was I who had kindled the unholy flame ; it was I who had put into her head that she had the means of making money. She appeared never to have thought of that ; she had been living wastefully for years, in a house five times too big for her, on a footing that I could explain only by the presumption that, excessive as it was, the space she enjoyed cost her next to nothing and that small as were her revenues they left her, for Venice, an appreciable margin. I had descended on her one day and taught her to calculate, and my almost extravagant comedy on the subject of the garden had presented me irresistibly in the light of a victim. Like all persons who achieve the miracle of changing their point of view when they are old she had been intensely converted ; she had seized my hint with a desperate, tremulous clutch.

I invited myself to go and get one of the chairs that stood ; at a distance, against the wall (she had given herself no concern as to whether I should sit or stand) ; and while I placed it near her I began,



gaily, 'Oh, dear madam, what an imagination you have, what an intellectual sweep! I am a poor devil of a man of letters who lives from day to day. How can I take palaces by the year? My existence is precarious. I don't know whether six months hence I shall have bread to put in my mouth. I have treated myself for once; it has been an immense luxury. But when it comes to going on——!'

'Are your rooms too dear? if they are you can have more for the same money,' Juliana responded. 'We can arrange, we can *combinare*, as they say here.'

'Well yes, since you ask me, they are too dear,' I said. 'Evidently you suppose me richer than I am.'

She looked at me in her barricaded way. 'If you write books don't you sell them?'

'Do you mean don't people buy them? A little—not so much as I could wish. Writing books, unless one be a great genius—and even then!—is the last road to fortune. I think there is no more money to be made by literature.'

'Perhaps you don't choose good subjects. What do you write about?' Miss Bordereau inquired.

'About the books of other people. I'm a critic, an historian, in a small way.' I wondered what she was coming to.

'And what other people, now?'

'Oh, better ones than myself: the great writers mainly—the great philosophers and poets of the past; those who are dead and gone and can't speak for themselves.'

'And what do you say about them?'

'I say they sometimes attached themselves to very clever women!' I answered, laughing. I spoke

with great deliberation, but as my words fell upon the air they struck me as imprudent. However, I risked them and I was not sorry, for perhaps after all the old woman would be willing to treat. It seemed to be tolerably obvious that she knew my secret: why therefore drag the matter out? But she did not take what I had said as a confession; she only asked:

‘Do you think it’s right to rake up the past?’

‘I don’t know that I know what you mean by raking it up; but how can we get at it unless we dig a little? The present has such a rough way of treading it down.’

‘Oh, I like the past, but I don’t like critics,’ the old woman declared, with her fine tranquillity.

‘Neither do I, but I like their discoveries.’

‘Aren’t they mostly lies?’

‘The lies are what they sometimes discover,’ I said, smiling at the quiet impertinence of this. ‘They often lay bare the truth.’

‘The truth is God’s, it isn’t man’s; we had better leave it alone. Who can judge of it—who can say?’

‘We are terribly in the dark, I know,’ I admitted; ‘but if we give up trying what becomes of all the fine things? What becomes of the work I just mentioned, that of the great philosophers and poets? It is all vain words if there is nothing to measure it by.’

‘You talk as if you were a tailor,’ said Miss Bordereau, whimsically; and then she added quickly, in a different manner, ‘This house is very fine; the proportions are magnificent. To-day I wanted to look at this place again. I made them bring me out here. When your man came, just now, to learn if

I would see you, I was on the point of sending for you, to ask if you didn't mean to go on. I wanted to judge what I'm letting you have. This sala is very grand,' she pursued, like an auctioneer, moving a little, as I guessed, her invisible eyes. 'I don't believe you often have lived in such a house, eh?'

'I can't often afford to!' I said.

'Well then, how much will you give for six months?'

I was on the point of exclaiming—and the air of excruciation in my face would have denoted a moral fact—'Don't, Juliana; for *his* sake, don't!' But I controlled myself and asked less passionately: 'Why should I remain so long as that?'

'I thought you liked it,' said Miss Bordereau, with her shrivelled dignity.

'So I thought I should.'

For a moment she said nothing more, and I left my own words to suggest to her what they might. I half expected her to say, coldly enough, that if I had been disappointed we need not continue the discussion, and this in spite of the fact that I believed her now to have in her mind (however it had come there), what would have told her that my disappointment was natural. But to my extreme surprise she ended by observing: 'If you don't think we have treated you well enough perhaps we can discover some way of treating you better.' This speech was somehow so incongruous that it made me laugh again, and I excused myself by saying that she talked as if I were a sulky boy, pouting in the corner, to be 'brought round.' I had not a grain of complaint to make; and could anything have exceeded Miss Tita's graciousness in accompanying me

a few nights before to the Piazza? At this the old woman went on: 'Well, you brought it on yourself!' And then in a different tone, 'She is a very nice girl.' I assented cordially to this proposition, and she expressed the hope that I did so not merely to be obliging, but that I really liked her. Meanwhile I wondered still more what Miss Bordereau was coming to. 'Except for me, to-day,' she said, 'she has not a relation in the world.' Did she by describing her niece as amiable and unencumbered wish to represent her as a *parti*?

It was perfectly true that I could not afford to go on with my rooms at a fancy price and that I had already devoted to my undertaking almost all the hard cash I had set apart for it. My patience and my time were by no means exhausted, but I should be able to draw upon them only on a more usual Venetian basis. I was willing to pay the venerable woman with whom my pecuniary dealings were such a discord twice as much as any other *padrona di casa* would have asked, but I was not willing to pay her twenty times as much. I told her so plainly, and my plainness appeared to have some success, for she exclaimed, 'Very good; you have done what I asked—you have made an offer!'

'Yes, but not for half a year. Only by the month.'

'Oh, I must think of that then.' She seemed disappointed that I would not tie myself to a period, and I guessed that she wished both to secure me and to discourage me; to say, severely, 'Do you dream that you can get off with less than six months? Do you dream that even by the end of that time you will be appreciably nearer your victory?' What

was more in my mind was that she had a fancy to play me the trick of making me engage myself when in fact she had annihilated the papers. There was a moment when my suspense on this point was so acute that I all but broke out with the question, and what kept it back was but a kind of instinctive recoil (lest it should be a mistake), from the last violence of self-exposure. She was such a subtle old witch that one could never tell where one stood with her. You may imagine whether it cleared up the puzzle when, just after she had said she would think of my proposal and without any formal transition, she drew out of her pocket with an embarrassed hand a small object wrapped in crumpled white paper. She held it there a moment and then she asked, 'Do you know much about curiosities?'

'About curiosities?'

'About antiquities, the old gimcracks that people pay so much for to-day. Do you know the kind of price they bring?'

I thought I saw what was coming, but I said ingenuously, 'Do you want to buy something?'

'No, I want to sell. What would an amateur give me for that?' She unfolded the white paper and made a motion for me to take from her a small oval portrait. I possessed myself of it with a hand of which I could only hope that she did not perceive the tremor, and she added, 'I would part with it only for a good price.'

At the first glance I recognised Jeffrey Aspern, and I was well aware that I flushed with the act. As she was watching me however I had the consistency to exclaim, 'What a striking face! Do tell me who it is.'

‘It’s an old friend of mine, a very distinguished man in his day. He gave it to me himself, but I’m afraid to mention his name, lest you never should have heard of him, critic and historian as you are. I know the world goes fast and one generation forgets another. He was all the fashion when I was young.’

She was perhaps amazed at my assurance, but I was surprised at hers; at her having the energy, in her state of health and at her time of life, to wish to sport with me that way simply for her private entertainment—the humour to test me and practise on me. This, at least, was the interpretation that I put upon her production of the portrait, for I could not believe that she really desired to sell it or cared for any information I might give her. What she wished was to dangle it before my eyes and put a prohibitive price on it. ‘The face comes back to me, it torments me,’ I said, turning the object this way and that and looking at it very critically. It was a careful but not a supreme work of art, larger than the ordinary miniature and representing a young man with a remarkably handsome face, in a high-collared green coat and a buff waistcoat. I judged the picture to have a valuable quality of resemblance and to have been painted when the model was about twenty-five years old. There are, as all the world knows, three other portraits of the poet in existence, but none of them is of so early a date as this elegant production. ‘I have never seen the original but I have seen other likenesses,’ I went on. ‘You expressed doubt of this generation having heard of the gentleman, but he strikes me for all the world as a celebrity. Now who is he? I can’t put my finger on him—I



can't give him 'a label. Wasn't he a writer? Surely he's a poet.' I was determined that it should be she, not I, who should first pronounce Jeffrey Aspern's name.

My resolution was taken in ignorance of Miss Bordereau's extremely resolute character, and her lips never formed in my hearing the syllables that meant so much for her. She neglected to answer my question but raised her hand to take back the picture, with a gesture which though ineffectual was in a high degree peremptory. 'It's only a person who should know for himself that would give me my price,' she said with a certain dryness.

'Oh, then, you have a price?' I did not restore the precious thing; not from any vindictive purpose but because I instinctively clung to it. We looked at each other hard while I retained it.

'I know the least I would take. What it occurred to me to ask you about is the most I shall be able to get.'

She made a movement, drawing herself together as if, in a spasm of dread at having lost her treasure, she were going to attempt the immense effort of rising to snatch it from me. I instantly placed it in her hand again, saying as I did so, 'I should like to have it myself, but with your ideas I could never afford it.'

She turned the small oval plate over in her lap, with its face down, and I thought I saw her catch her breath a little, as if she had had a strain or an escape. This however did not prevent her saying in a moment, 'You would buy a likeness of a person you don't know, by an artist who has no reputation?'

'The artist may have no reputation, but that thing



is wonderfully well painted,' I replied, to give myself a reason.

'It's lucky you thought of saying that, because the painter was my father.'

'That makes the picture indeed precious!' I exclaimed, laughing; and I may add that a part of my laughter came from my satisfaction in finding that I had been right in my theory of Miss Bordereau's origin. Aspern had of course met the young lady when he went to her father's studio as a sitter. I observed to Miss Bordereau that if she would entrust me with her property for twenty-four hours I should be happy to take advice upon it; but she made no answer to this save to slip it in silence into her pocket. This convinced me still more that she had no sincere intention of selling it during her lifetime, though she may have desired to satisfy herself as to the sum her niece, should she leave it to her, might expect eventually to obtain for it. 'Well, at any rate I hope you will not offer it without giving me notice,' I said, as she remained irresponsive. 'Remember that I am a possible purchaser.'

'I should want your money first!' she returned, with unexpected rudeness; and then, as if she be-thought herself that I had just cause to complain of such an insinuation and wished to turn the matter off, asked abruptly what I talked about with her niece when I went out with her that way in the evening.

'You speak as if we had set up the habit,' I replied. 'Certainly I should be very glad if it were to become a habit. But in that case I should feel a still greater scruple at betraying a lady's confidence.'

'Her confidence? Has she got confidence?'

‘Here she is—she can tell you herself,’ I said ; for Miss Tita now appeared on the threshold of the old woman’s parlour. ‘Have you got confidence, Miss Tita? Your aunt wants very much to know.’

‘Not in her, not in her!’ the younger lady declared, shaking her head with a dolefulness that was neither jocular nor affected. ‘I don’t know what to do with her ; she has fits of horrid imprudence. She is so easily tired—and yet she has begun to roam—to drag herself about the house.’ And she stood looking down at her immemorial companion with a sort of helpless wonder, as if all their years of familiarity had not made her perversities, on occasion, any more easy to follow.

‘I know what I’m about. I’m not losing my mind. I daresay you would like to think so,’ said Miss Bordereau, with a cynical little sigh.

‘I don’t suppose you came out here yourself. Miss Tita must have had to lend you a hand,’ I interposed, with a pacifying intention.

‘Oh, she insisted that we should push her ; and when she insists!’ said Miss Tita, in the same tone of apprehension ; as if there were no knowing what service that she disapproved of her aunt might force her next to render.

‘I have always got most things done I wanted, thank God! The people I have lived with have humoured me,’ the old woman continued, speaking out of the gray ashes of her vanity.

‘I suppose you mean that they have obeyed you.’

‘Well, whatever it is, when they like you.’

‘It’s just because I like you that I want to resist,’ said Miss Tita, with a nervous laugh.

‘Oh, I suspect you’ll bring Miss Bordereau up-

stairs next, to pay me a visit,' I went on ; to which the old lady replied :

' Oh no ; I can keep an eye on you from here !'

' You are very tired ; you will certainly be ill to-night !' cried Miss Tita.

' Nonsense, my dear ; I feel better at this moment than I have done for a month. To-morrow I shall come out again. I want to be where I can see this clever gentleman.'

' Shouldn't you perhaps see me better in your sitting-room ?' I inquired.

' Don't you mean shouldn't you have a better chance at me ?' she returned, fixing me a moment with her green shade.

' Ah, I haven't that anywhere ! I look at you but I don't see you.'

' You excite her dreadfully—and that is not good,' said Miss Tita, giving me a reproachful, appealing look.

' I want to watch you—I want to watch you !' the old lady went on.

' Well then, let us spend as much of our time together as possible—I don't care where—and that will give you every facility.'

' Oh, I've seen you enough for to-day. I'm satisfied. Now I'll go home.' Miss Tita laid her hands on the back of her aunt's chair and began to push, but I begged her to let me take her place. ' Oh yes, you may move me this way—you sha'n't in any other !' Miss Bordereau exclaimed, as she felt herself propelled firmly and easily over the smooth, hard floor. Before we reached the door of her own apartment she commanded me to stop, and she took a long, last look up and down the noble sala. ' Oh,

it's a magnificent house !' she murmured ; after which I pushed her forward. When we had entered the parlour Miss Tita told me that she should now be able to manage, and at the same moment the little red-haired *donna* came to meet her mistress. Miss Tita's idea was evidently to get her aunt immediately back to bed. I confess that in spite of this urgency I was guilty of the indiscretion of lingering ; it held me there to think that I was nearer the documents I coveted—that they were probably put away somewhere in the faded, unsociable room. The place had indeed a bareness which did not suggest hidden treasures ; there were no dusky nooks nor curtained corners, no massive cabinets nor chests with iron bands. Moreover it was possible, it was perhaps even probable that the old lady had consigned her relics to her bedroom, to some battered box that was shoved under the bed, to the drawer of some lame dressing-table, where they would be in the range of vision by the dim night-lamp. None the less I scrutinised every article of furniture, every conceivable cover for a hoard, and noticed that there were half a dozen things with drawers, and in particular a tall old secretary, with brass ornaments of the style of the Empire—a receptacle somewhat rickety but still capable of keeping a great many secrets. I don't know why this article fascinated me so, inasmuch as I certainly had no definite purpose of breaking into it ; but I stared at it so hard that Miss Tita noticed me and changed colour. Her doing this made me think I was right and that wherever they might have been before the Aspern papers at that moment languished behind the peevish little lock of the secretary. It was hard to remove my eyes from the

dull mahogany front when I reflected that a simple panel divided me from the goal of my hopes ; but I remembered my prudence and with an effort took leave of Miss Bordereau. To make the effort graceful I said to her that I should certainly bring her an opinion about the little picture.

‘The little picture?’ Miss Tita asked, surprised.

‘What do *you* know about it, my dear?’ the old woman demanded. ‘You needn’t mind. I have fixed my price.’

‘And what may that be?’

‘A thousand pounds.’

‘Oh Lord!’ cried poor Miss Tita, irrepressibly.

‘Is that what she talks to you about?’ said Miss Bordereau.

‘Imagine your aunt’s wanting to know!’ I had to separate from Miss Tita with only those words, though I should have liked immensely to add, ‘For heaven’s sake meet me to-night in the garden!’

## VIII

As it turned out the precaution had not been needed, for three hours later, just as I had finished my dinner, Miss Bordereau's niece appeared, unannounced, in the open doorway of the room in which my simple repasts were served. I remember well that I felt no surprise at seeing her ; which is not a proof that I did not believe in her timidity. It was immense, but in a case in which there was a particular reason for boldness it never would have prevented her from running up to my rooms. I saw that she was now quite full of a particular reason ; it threw her forward—made her seize me, as I rose to meet her, by the arm.

‘My aunt is very ill ; I think she is dying !’

‘Never in the world,’ I answered, bitterly. ‘Don’t you be afraid !’

‘Do go for a doctor—do, do ! Olimpia is gone for the one we always have, but she doesn’t come back ; I don’t know what has happened to her. I told her that if he was not at home she was to follow him where he had gone ; but apparently she is following him all over Venice. I don’t know what to do—she looks so as if she were sinking.’

‘May I see her, may I judge ?’ I asked. ‘Of



course I shall be delighted to bring some one ; but hadn't we better send my man instead, so that I may stay with you ?'

Miss Tita assented to this and I despatched my servant for the best doctor in the neighbourhood. I hurried downstairs with her, and on the way she told me that an hour after I quitted them in the afternoon Miss Bordereau had had an attack of 'oppression,' a terrible difficulty in breathing. This had subsided but had left her so exhausted that she did not come up: she seemed all gone. I repeated that she was not gone, that she would not go yet; whereupon Miss Tita gave me a sharper sidelong glance than she had ever directed at me and said, 'Really, what do you mean? I suppose you don't accuse her of making-believe!' I forget what reply I made to this, but I grant that in my heart I thought the old woman capable of any weird manœuvre. Miss Tita wanted to know what I had done to her; her aunt had told her that I had made her so angry. I declared I had done nothing—I had been exceedingly careful; to which my companion rejoined that Miss Bordereau had assured her she had had a scene with me—a scene that had upset her. I answered with some resentment that it was a scene of her own making—that I couldn't think what she was angry with me for unless for not seeing my way to give a thousand pounds for the portrait of Jeffrey Aspern. 'And did she show you that? Oh gracious—oh deary me!' groaned Miss Tita, who appeared to feel that the situation was passing out of her control and that the elements of her fate were thickening around her. I said that I would give anything to possess it, yet that I had not a thousand pounds; but I stopped when we came to the door



of Miss Bordereau's room. I had an immense curiosity to pass it, but I thought it my duty to represent to Miss Tita that if I made the invalid angry she ought perhaps to be spared the sight of me. 'The sight of you? Do you think she can see?' my companion demanded, almost with indignation. I did think so but forbore to say it, and I softly followed my conductress.

I remember that what I said to her as I stood for a moment beside the old woman's bed was, 'Does she never show you her eyes then? Have you never seen them?' Miss Bordereau had been divested of her green shade, but (it was not my fortune to behold Juliana in her nightcap) the upper half of her face was covered by the fall of a piece of dingy lacelike muslin, a sort of extemporised hood which, wound round her head, descended to the end of her nose, leaving nothing visible but her white withered cheeks and puckered mouth, closed tightly and, as it were, consciously. Miss Tita gave me a glance of surprise, evidently not seeing a reason for my impatience. 'You mean that she always wears something? She does it to preserve them.'

'Because they are so fine?'

'Oh, to-day, to-day!' And Miss Tita shook her head, speaking very low. 'But they used to be magnificent!'

'Yes indeed, we have Aspern's word for that.' And as I looked again at the old woman's wrappings I could imagine that she had not wished to allow people a reason to say that the great poet had overdone it. But I did not waste my time in considering Miss Bordereau, in whom the appearance of respiration was so slight as to suggest that no human

attention could ever help her more. I turned my eyes all over the room, rummaging with them the closets, the chests of drawers, the tables. Miss Tita met them quickly and read, I think, what was in them ; but she did not answer it, turning away restlessly, anxiously, so that I felt rebuked, with reason, for a preoccupation that was almost profane in the presence of our dying companion. All the same I took another look, endeavouring to pick out mentally the place to try first, for a person who should wish to put his hand on Miss Bordereau's papers directly after her death. The room was a dire confusion ; it looked like the room of an old actress. There were clothes hanging over chairs, odd-looking, shabby bundles here and there, and various pasteboard boxes piled together, battered, bulging and discoloured, which might have been fifty years old. Miss Tita after a moment noticed the direction of my eyes again and, as if she guessed how I judged the air of the place (forgetting I had no business to judge it at all), said, perhaps to defend herself from the imputation of complicity in such untidiness :

‘She likes it this way ; we can't move things. There are old bandboxes she has had most of her life.’ Then she added, half taking pity on my real thought, ‘Those things were *there*.’ And she pointed to a small, low trunk which stood under a sofa where there was just room for it. It appeared to be a queer, superannuated coffer, of painted wood, with elaborate handles and shrivelled straps and with the colour (it had last been endued with a coat of light green) much rubbed off. It evidently had travelled with Juliana in the olden time—in the days of her adventures, which it had shared. It would

have made a strange figure arriving at a modern hotel.

‘*Were* there—they aren’t now?’ I asked, startled by Miss Tita’s implication.

She was going to answer, but at that moment the doctor came in—the doctor whom the little maid had been sent to fetch and whom she had at last overtaken. My servant, going on his own errand, had met her with her companion in tow, and in the sociable Venetian spirit, retracing his steps with them, had also come up to the threshold of Miss Bordereau’s room, where I saw him peeping over the doctor’s shoulder. I motioned him away the more instantly that the sight of his prying face reminded me that I myself had almost as little to do there—an admonition confirmed by the sharp way the little doctor looked at me, appearing to take me for a rival who had the field before him. He was a short, fat, brisk gentleman who wore the tall hat of his profession and seemed to look at everything but his patient. He looked particularly at me, as if it struck him that I should be better for a dose, so that I bowed to him and left him with the women, going down to smoke a cigar in the garden. I was nervous; I could not go further; I could not leave the place. I don’t know exactly what I thought might happen, but it seemed to me important to be there. I wandered about in the alleys—the warm night had come on—smoking cigar after cigar and looking at the light in Miss Bordereau’s windows. They were open now, I could see; the situation was different. Sometimes the light moved, but not quickly; it did not suggest the hurry of a crisis. Was the old woman dying or was she already dead? Had the doctor

said that there was nothing to be done at her tremendous age but to let her quietly pass away ; or had he simply announced with a look a little more conventional that the end of the end had come? Were the other two women moving about to perform the offices that follow in such a case? It made me uneasy not to be nearer, as if I thought the doctor himself might carry away the papers with him. I bit my cigar hard as it came over me again that perhaps there were now no papers to carry !

I wandered about for an hour—for an hour and a half. I looked out for Miss Tita at one of the windows, having a vague idea that she might come there to give me some sign. Would she not see the red tip of my cigar moving about in the dark and feel that I wanted eminently to know what the doctor had said? I am afraid it is a proof my anxieties had made me gross that I should have taken in some degree for granted that at such an hour, in the midst of the greatest change that could take place in her life, they were uppermost also in poor Miss Tita's mind. My servant came down and spoke to me ; he knew nothing save that the doctor had gone after a visit of half an hour. If he had stayed half an hour then Miss Bordereau was still alive : it could not have taken so much time as that to enunciate the contrary. I sent the man out of the house ; there were moments when the sense of his curiosity annoyed me and this was one of them. *He* had been watching my cigar-tip from an upper window, if Miss Tita had not ; he could not know what I was after and I could not tell him, though I was conscious he had fantastic private theories about

me which he thought fine and which I, had I known them, should have thought offensive.

I went upstairs at last but I ascended no higher than the sala. The door of Miss Bordereau's apartment was open, showing from the parlour the dimness of a poor candle. I went toward it with a light tread and at the same moment Miss Tita appeared and stood looking at me as I approached. 'She's better—she's better,' she said, even before I had asked. 'The doctor has given her something; she woke up, came back to life while he was there. He says there is no immediate danger.'

'No immediate danger? Surely he thinks her condition strange!'

'Yes, because she had been excited. That affects her dreadfully.'

'It will do so again then, because she excites herself. She did so this afternoon.'

'Yes; she mustn't come out any more,' said Miss Tita, with one of her lapses into a deeper placidity.

'What is the use of making such a remark as that if you begin to rattle her about again the first time she bids you?'

'I won't—I won't do it any more.'

'You must learn to resist her,' I went on.

'Oh yes, I shall; I shall do so better if you tell me it's right.'

'You mustn't do it for me; you must do it for yourself. It all comes back to you, if you are frightened.'

'Well, I am not frightened now,' said Miss Tita, cheerfully. 'She is very quiet.'

'Is she conscious again—does she speak?'

‘No, she doesn’t speak, but she takes my hand. She holds it fast.’

‘Yes,’ I rejoined, ‘I can see what force she still has by the way she grabbed that picture this afternoon. But if she holds you fast how comes it that you are here?’

Miss Tita hesitated a moment ; though her face was in deep shadow (she had her back to the light in the parlour and I had put down my own candle far off, near the door of the sala), I thought I saw her smile ingenuously. ‘I came on purpose—I heard your step.’

‘Why, I came on tiptoe, as inaudibly as possible.’

‘Well, I heard you,’ said Miss Tita.

‘And is your aunt alone now?’

‘Oh no ; Olimpia is sitting there.’

On my side I hesitated. ‘Shall we then step in there?’ And I nodded at the parlour ; I wanted more and more to be on the spot.

‘We can’t talk there—she will hear us.’

I was on the point of replying that in that case we would sit silent, but I was too conscious that this would not do, as there was something I desired immensely to ask her. So I proposed that we should walk a little in the sala, keeping more at the other end, where we should not disturb the old lady. Miss Tita assented unconditionally ; the doctor was coming again, she said, and she would be there to meet him at the door. We strolled through the fine superfluous hall, where on the marble floor—particularly as at first we said nothing—our footsteps were more audible than I had expected. When we reached the other end—the wide window, inveterately closed, connecting with the balcony that overhung the canal—I suggested that we should



remain there, as she would see the doctor arrive still better. I opened the window and we passed out on the balcony. The air of the canal seemed even heavier, hotter than that of the sala. The place was hushed and void ; the quiet neighbourhood had gone to sleep. A lamp, here and there, over the narrow black water, glimmered in double ; the voice of a man going homeward singing, with his jacket on his shoulder and his hat on his ear, came to us from a distance. This did not prevent the scene from being very *comme il faut*, as Miss Bordereau had called it the first time I saw her. Presently a gondola passed along the canal with its slow rhythmical plash, and as we listened we watched it in silence. It did not stop, it did not carry the doctor ; and after it had gone on I said to Miss Tita :

‘And where are they now—the things that were in the trunk?’

‘In the trunk?’

‘That green box you pointed out to me in her room. You said her papers had been there ; you seemed to imply that she had transferred them.’

‘Oh yes ; they are not in the trunk,’ said Miss Tita.

‘May I ask if you have looked?’

‘Yes, I have looked—for you.’

‘How for me, dear Miss Tita? Do you mean you would have given them to me if you had found them?’ I asked, almost trembling.

She delayed to reply and I waited. Suddenly she broke out, ‘I don’t know what I would do—what I wouldn’t!’

‘Would you look again—somewhere else?’

She had spoken with a strange, unexpected



emotion, and she went on in the same tone : ' I can't—I can't—while she lies there. It isn't decent.'

' No, it isn't decent,' I replied, gravely. ' Let the poor lady rest in peace.' And the words, on my lips, were not hypocritical, for I felt reprimanded and shamed.

Miss Tita added in a moment, as if she had guessed this and were sorry for me, but at the same time wished to explain that I did drive her on or at least did insist too much : ' I can't deceive her that way. I can't deceive her—perhaps on her deathbed.'

' Heaven forbid I should ask you, though I have been guilty myself!'

' You have been guilty?'

' I have sailed under false colours.' I felt now as if I must tell her that I had given her an invented name, on account of my fear that her aunt would have heard of me and would refuse to take me in. I explained this and also that I had really been a party to the letter written to them by John Cumnor months before.

She listened with great attention, looking at me with parted lips, and when I had made my confession she said, ' Then your real name—what is it?' She repeated it over twice when I had told her, accompanying it with the exclamation ' Gracious, gracious!' Then she added, ' I like your own best.'

' So do I,' I said, laughing. ' Ouf! it's a relief to get rid of the other.'

' So it was a regular plot—a kind of conspiracy?'

' Oh, a conspiracy—we were only two,' I replied, leaving out Mrs. Prest of course.

She hesitated ; I thought she was perhaps going

to say that we had been very base. But she remarked after a moment, in a candid, wondering way, 'How much you must want them!'

'Oh, I do, passionately!' I conceded, smiling. And this chance made me go on, forgetting my compunction of a moment before. 'How can she possibly have changed their place herself? How can she walk? How can she arrive at that sort of muscular exertion? How can she lift and carry things?'

'Oh, when one wants and when one has so much will!' said Miss Tita, as if she had thought over my question already herself and had simply had no choice but that answer—the idea that in the dead of night, or at some moment when the coast was clear, the old woman had been capable of a miraculous effort.

'Have you questioned Olimpia? Hasn't she helped her—hasn't she done it for her?' I asked; to which Miss Tita replied promptly and positively that their servant had had nothing to do with the matter, though without admitting definitely that she had spoken to her. It was as if she were a little shy, a little ashamed now of letting me see how much she had entered into my uneasiness and had me on her mind. Suddenly she said to me, without any immediate relevance:

I feel as if you were a new person, now that you have got a new name.'

'It isn't a new one; it is a very good old one, thank heaven!'

She looked at me a moment. 'I do like it better.'

'Oh, if you didn't I would almost go on with the other!'

'Would you really?'

I laughed again, but for all answer to this inquiry I said, 'Of course if she can rummage about that way she can perfectly have burnt them.'

'You must wait—you must wait,' Miss Tita moralised mournfully; and her tone ministered little to my patience, for it seemed after all to accept that wretched possibility. I would teach myself to wait, I declared nevertheless; because in the first place I could not do otherwise and in the second I had her promise, given me the other night, that she would help me.

'Of course if the papers are gone that's no use,' she said; not as if she wished to recede, but only to be conscientious.

'Naturally. But if you could only find out!' I groaned, quivering again.

'I thought you said you would wait.'

'Oh, you mean wait even for that?'

'For what then?'

'Oh, nothing,' I replied, rather foolishly, being ashamed to tell her what had been implied in my submission to delay—the idea that she would do more than merely find out. I know not whether she guessed this; at all events she appeared to become aware of the necessity for being a little more rigid.

'I didn't promise to deceive, did I? I don't think I did.'

'It doesn't much matter whether you did or not, for you couldn't!'

I don't think Miss Tita would have contested this even had she not been diverted by our seeing the doctor's gondola shoot into the little canal and approach the house. I noted that he came as fast as if he believed that Miss Bordereau was still in

danger. We looked down at him while he disembarked and then went back into the sala to meet him. When he came up however I naturally left Miss Tita to go off with him alone, only asking her leave to come back later for news.

I went out of the house and took a long walk, as far as the Piazza, where my restlessness declined to quit me. I was unable to sit down (it was very late now but there were people still at the little tables in front of the cafés); I could only walk round and round, and I did so half a dozen times. I was uncomfortable, but it gave me a certain pleasure to have told Miss Tita who I really was. At last I took my way home again, slowly getting all but inextricably lost, as I did whenever I went out in Venice: so that it was considerably past midnight when I reached my door. The sala, upstairs, was as dark as usual and my lamp as I crossed it found nothing satisfactory to show me. I was disappointed, for I had notified Miss Tita that I would come back for a report, and I thought she might have left a light there as a sign. The door of the ladies' apartment was closed; which seemed an intimation that my faltering friend had gone to bed, tired of waiting for me. I stood in the middle of the place, considering, hoping she would hear me and perhaps peep out, saying to myself too that she would never go to bed with her aunt in a state so critical; she would sit up and watch—she would be in a chair, in her dressing-gown. I went nearer the door; I stopped there and listened. I heard nothing at all and at last I tapped gently. No answer came and after another minute I turned the handle. There was no light in the room; this ought to have prevented me from going in, but it had

no such effect. If I have candidly narrated the importunities, the indelicacies, of which my desire to possess myself of Jeffrey Aspern's papers had rendered me capable I need not shrink from confessing this last indiscretion. I think it was the worst thing I did ; yet there were extenuating circumstances. I was deeply though doubtless not disinterestedly anxious for more news of the old lady, and Miss Tita had accepted from me, as it were, a rendezvous which it might have been a point of honour with me to keep. It may be said that her leaving the place dark was a positive sign that she released me, and to this I can only reply that I desired not to be released.

The door of Miss Bordereau's room was open and I could see beyond it the faintness of a taper. There was no sound—my footstep caused no one to stir. I came further into the room ; I lingered there with my lamp in my hand. I wanted to give Miss Tita a chance to come to me if she were with her aunt, as she must be. I made no noise to call her ; I only waited to see if she would not notice my light. She did not, and I explained this (I found afterwards I was right) by the idea that she had fallen asleep. If she had fallen asleep her aunt was not on her mind, and my explanation ought to have led me to go out as I had come. I must repeat again that it did not, for I found myself at the same moment thinking of something else. I had no definite purpose, no bad intention, but I felt myself held to the spot by an acute, though absurd, sense of opportunity. For what I could not have said, inasmuch as it was not in my mind that I might commit a theft. Even if it had been I was confronted with the evident fact that Miss Bordereau

did not leave her secretary, her cupboard and the drawers of her tables gaping. I had no keys, no tools and no ambition to smash her furniture. None the less it came to me that I was now, perhaps alone, unmolested, at the hour of temptation and secrecy, nearer to the tormenting treasure than I had ever been. I held up my lamp, let the light play on the different objects as if it could tell me something. Still there came no movement from the other room. If Miss Tita was sleeping she was sleeping sound. Was she doing so—generous creature—on purpose to leave me the field? Did she know I was there and was she just keeping quiet to see what I would do—what I *could* do? But what could I do, when it came to that? She herself knew even better than I how little.

I stopped in front of the secretary, looking at it very idiotically; for what had it to say to me after all? In the first place it was locked, and in the second it almost surely contained nothing in which I was interested. Ten to one the papers had been destroyed; and even if they had not been destroyed the old woman would not have put them in such a place as that after removing them from the green trunk—would not have transferred them, if she had the idea of their safety on her brain, from the better hiding-place to the worse. The secretary was more conspicuous, more accessible in a room in which she could no longer mount guard. It opened with a key, but there was a little brass handle, like a button, as well; I saw this as I played my lamp over it. I did something more than this at that moment: I caught a glimpse of the possibility that Miss Tita wished me really to understand. If she did not



wish me to understand, if she wished me to keep away, why had she not locked the door of communication between the sitting-room and the sala? That would have been a definite sign that I was to leave them alone. If I did not leave them alone she meant me to come for a purpose—a purpose now indicated by the quick, fantastic idea that to oblige me she had unlocked the secretary. She had not left the key, but the lid would probably move if I touched the button. This theory fascinated me, and I bent over very close to judge. I did not propose to do anything, not even—not in the least—to let down the lid; I only wanted to test my theory, to see if the cover *would* move. I touched the button with my hand—a mere touch would tell me; and as I did so (it is embarrassing for me to relate it), I looked over my shoulder. It was a chance, an instinct, for I had not heard anything. I almost let my luminary drop and certainly I stepped back, straightening myself up at what I saw. Miss Bordereau stood there in her night-dress, in the doorway of her room, watching me; her hands were raised, she had lifted the everlasting curtain that covered half her face, and for the first, the last, the only time I beheld her extraordinary eyes. They glared at me, they made me horribly ashamed. I never shall forget her strange little bent white tottering figure, with its lifted head, her attitude, her expression; neither shall I forget the tone in which as I turned, looking at her, she hissed out passionately, furiously:

‘Ah, you publishing scoundrel!’

I know not what I stammered, to excuse myself, to explain; but I went towards her, to tell her I



meant no harm. She waved me off with her old hands, retreating before me in horror ; and the next thing I knew she had fallen back with a quick spasm, as if death had descended on her, into Miss Tita's arms.

## IX

I LEFT Venice the next morning, as soon as I learnt that the old lady had not succumbed, as I feared at the moment, to the shock I had given her—the shock I may also say she had given me. How in the world could I have supposed her capable of getting out of bed by herself? I failed to see Miss Tita before going; I only saw the *donna*, whom I entrusted with a note for her younger mistress. In this note I mentioned that I should be absent but for a few days. I went to Treviso, to Bassano, to Castelfranco; I took walks and drives and looked at musty old churches with ill-lighted pictures and spent hours seated smoking at the doors of cafés, where there were flies and yellow curtains, on the shady side of sleepy little squares. In spite of these pastimes, which were mechanical and perfunctory, I scantily enjoyed my journey: there was too strong a taste of the disagreeable in my life. It had been devilish awkward, as the young men say, to be found by Miss Bordereau in the dead of night examining the attachment of her bureau; and it had not been less so to have to believe for a good many hours afterward that it was highly probable I had killed her. In writing to Miss Tita I attempted

to minimise these irregularities ; but as she gave me no word of answer I could not know what impression I made upon her. ' It rankled in my mind that I had been called a publishing scoundrel, for certainly I did publish and certainly I had not been very delicate. There was a moment when I stood convinced that the only way to make up for this latter fault was to take myself away altogether on the instant ; to sacrifice my hopes and relieve the two poor women for ever of the oppression of my intercourse. Then I reflected that I had better try a short absence first, for I must already have had a sense (unexpressed and dim) that in disappearing completely it would not be merely my own hopes that I should condemn to extinction. It would perhaps be sufficient if I stayed away long enough to give the elder lady time to think she was rid of me. That she would wish to be rid of me after this (if I was not rid of her) was now not to be doubted : that nocturnal scene would have cured her of the disposition to put up with my company for the sake of my dollars. I said to myself that after all I could not abandon Miss Tita, and I continued to say this even while I observed that she quite failed to comply with my earnest request (I had given her two or three addresses, at little towns, *poste restante*) that she would let me know how she was getting on. I would have made my servant write to me but that he was unable to manage a pen. It struck me there was a kind of scorn in Miss Tita's silence (little disdainful as she had ever been), so that I was uncomfortable and sore. I had scruples about going back and yet I had others about not doing so, for I wanted to put myself on a better footing. The end

of it was that I did return to Venice on the twelfth day ; and as my gondola gently bumped against Miss Bordereau's steps a certain palpitation of suspense told me that I had done myself a violence in holding off so long.

I had faced about so abruptly that I had not telegraphed to my servant. He was therefore not at the station to meet me, but he poked out his head from an upper window when I reached the house. 'They have put her into the earth, *la vecchia*,' he said to me in the lower hall, while he shouldered my valise ; and he grinned and almost winked, as if he knew I should be pleased at the news.

'She's dead !' I exclaimed, giving him a very different look.

'So it appears, since they have buried her.'

'It's all over ? When was the funeral ?'

'The other yesterday. But a funeral you could scarcely call it, signore ; it was a dull little passeggio of two gondolas. Poveretta !' the man continued, referring apparently to Miss Tita. His conception of funerals was apparently that they were mainly to amuse the living.

I wanted to know about Miss Tita—how she was and where she was—but I asked him no more questions till we had got upstairs. Now that the fact had met me I took a bad view of it, especially of the idea that poor Miss Tita had had to manage by herself after the end. What did she know about arrangements, about the steps to take in such a case ? Poveretta indeed ! I could only hope that the doctor had given her assistance and that she had not been neglected by the old friends of whom she

had told me, the little band of the faithful whose fidelity consisted in coming to the house once a year. I elicited from my servant that two old ladies and an old gentleman had in fact rallied round Miss Tita and had supported her (they had come for her in a gondola of their own) during the journey to the cemetery, the little red-walled island of tombs which lies to the north of the town, on the way to Murano. It appeared from these circumstances that the Misses Bordereau were Catholics, a discovery I had never made, as the old woman could not go to church and her niece, so far as I perceived, either did not or went only to early mass in the parish, before I was stirring. Certainly even the priests respected their seclusion; I had never caught the whisk of the curato's skirt. That evening, an hour later, I sent my servant down with five words written on a card, to ask Miss Tita if she would see me for a few moments. She was not in the house, where he had sought her, he told me when he came back, but in the garden walking about to refresh herself and gathering flowers. He had found her there and she would be very happy to see me.

I went down and passed half an hour with poor Miss Tita. She had always had a look of musty mourning (as if she were wearing out old robes of sorrow that would not come to an end), and in this respect there was no appreciable change in her appearance. But she evidently had been crying, crying a great deal—simply, satisfyingly, refreshingly, with a sort of primitive, retarded sense of loneliness and violence. But she had none of the formalism or the self-consciousness of grief, and I

was almost surprised to see her standing there in the first dusk with her hands full of flowers, smiling at me with her reddened eyes. Her white face, in the frame of her mantilla, looked longer, leaner than usual. I had had an idea that she would be a good deal disgusted with me—would consider that I ought to have been on the spot to advise her, to help her; and, though I was sure there was no rancour in her composition and no great conviction of the importance of her affairs, I had prepared myself for a difference in her manner, for some little injured look, half familiar, half estranged, which should say to my conscience, ‘Well, you are a nice person to have professed things!’ But historic truth compels me to declare that Tita Bordereau’s countenance expressed unqualified pleasure in seeing her late aunt’s lodger. That touched him extremely and he thought it simplified his situation until he found it did not. I was as kind to her that evening as I knew how to be, and I walked about the garden with her for half an hour. There was no explanation of any sort between us; I did not ask her why she had not answered my letter. Still less did I repeat what I had said to her in that communication; if she chose to let me suppose that she had forgotten the position in which Miss Bordereau surprised me that night and the effect of the discovery on the old woman I was quite willing to take it that way: I was grateful to her for not treating me as if I had killed her aunt.

We strolled and strolled and really not much passed between us save the recognition of her bereavement, conveyed in my manner and in a visible air that she had of depending on me now, since I

let her see that I took an interest in her. Miss Tita had none of the pride that makes a person wish to preserve the look of independence; she did not in the least pretend that she knew at present what would become of her. I forbore to touch particularly on that however, for I certainly was not prepared to say that I would take charge of her. I was cautious; not ignobly, I think, for I felt that her knowledge of life was so small that in her unsophisticated vision there would be no reason why—since I seemed to pity her—I should not look after her. She told me how her aunt had died, very peacefully at the last, and how everything had been done afterwards by the care of her good friends (fortunately, thanks to me, she said, smiling, there was money in the house; and she repeated that when once the Italians like you they are your friends for life); and when we had gone into this she asked me about my *giro*, my impressions, the places I had seen. I told her what I could, making it up partly, I am afraid, as in my depression I had not seen much; and after she had heard me she exclaimed, quite as if she had forgotten her aunt and her sorrow, ‘Dear, dear, how much I should like to do such things—to take a little journey!’ It came over me for the moment that I ought to propose some tour, say I would take her anywhere she liked; and I remarked at any rate that some excursion—to give her a change—might be managed: we would think of it, talk it over. I said never a word to her about the Aspern documents; asked no questions as to what she had ascertained or what had otherwise happened with regard to them before Miss Bordereau’s death. It was not that I was not on pins and needles to know, but that



I thought it more decent not to betray my anxiety so soon after the catastrophe. I hoped she herself would say something, but she never glanced that way, and I thought this natural at the time. Later however, that night, it occurred to me that her silence was somewhat strange; for if she had talked of my movements, of anything so detached as the Giorgione at Castelfranco, she might have alluded to what she could easily remember was in my mind. It was not to be supposed that the emotion produced by her aunt's death had blotted out the recollection that I was interested in that lady's relics, and I fidgeted afterwards as it came to me that her reticence might very possibly mean simply that nothing had been found. We separated in the garden (it was she who said she must go in); now that she was alone in the rooms I felt that (judged, at any rate, by Venetian ideas) I was on rather a different footing in regard to visiting her there. As I shook hands with her for good-night I asked her if she had any general plan—had thought over what she had better do. 'Oh yes, oh yes, but I haven't settled anything yet,' she replied, quite cheerfully. Was her cheerfulness explained by the impression that I would settle for her?

I was glad the next morning that we had neglected practical questions, for this gave me a pretext for seeing her again immediately. There was a very practical question to be touched upon. I owed it to her to let her know formally that of course I did not expect her to keep me on as a lodger, and also to show some interest in her own tenure, what she might have on her hands in the way of a lease. But I was not destined, as it happened,

to converse with her for more than an instant on either of these points. I sent her no message ; I simply went down to the sala and walked to and fro there. I knew she would come out ; she would very soon discover I was there. Somehow I preferred not to be shut up with her ; gardens and big halls seemed better places to talk. It was a splendid morning, with something in the air that told of the waning of the long Venetian summer ; a freshness from the sea which stirred the flowers in the garden and made a pleasant draught in the house, less shuttered and darkened now than when the old woman was alive. It was the beginning of autumn, of the end of the golden months. With this it was the end of my experiment—or would be in the course of half an hour, when I should really have learned that the papers had been reduced to ashes. After that there would be nothing left for me but to go to the station ; for seriously (and as it struck me in the morning light) I could not linger there to act as guardian to a piece of middle-aged female helplessness. If she had not saved the papers wherein should I be indebted to her ? I think I winced a little as I asked myself how much, if she *had* saved them, I should have to recognise and, as it were, to reward such a courtesy. Might not that circumstance after all saddle me with a guardianship ? If this idea did not make me more uncomfortable as I walked up and down it was because I was convinced I had nothing to look to. If the old woman had not destroyed everything before she pounced upon me in the parlour she had done so afterwards.

It took Miss Tita rather longer than I had expected to guess that I was there ; but when at last

she came out she looked at me without surprise. I said to her that I had been waiting for her and she asked why I had not let her know. I was glad the next day that I had checked myself before remarking that I had wished to see if a friendly intuition would not tell her: it became a satisfaction to me that I had not indulged in that rather tender joke. What I did say was virtually the truth—that I was too nervous, since I expected her now to settle my fate.

‘Your fate?’ said Miss Tita, giving me a queer look; and as she spoke I noticed a rare change in her. She was different from what she had been the evening before—less natural, less quiet. She had been crying the day before and she was not crying now, and yet she struck me as less confident. It was as if something had happened to her during the night, or at least as if she had thought of something that troubled her—something in particular that affected her relations with me, made them more embarrassing and complicated. Had she simply perceived that her aunt’s not being there now altered my position?

‘I mean about our papers. *Are* there any? You must know now.’

‘Yes, there are a great many; more than I supposed.’ I was struck with the way her voice trembled as she told me this.

‘Do you mean that you have got them in there—and that I may see them?’

‘I don’t think you can see them,’ said Miss Tita, with an extraordinary expression of entreaty in her eyes, as if the dearest hope she had in the world now was that I would not take them from her. But how could she expect me to make such a sacrifice as that

after all that had passed between us? What had I come back to Venice for but to see them, to take them? My delight at learning they were still in existence was such that if the poor woman had gone down on her knees to beseech me never to mention them again I would have treated the proceeding as a bad joke. 'I have got them but I can't show them,' she added.

'Not even to me? Ah, Miss Tita!' I groaned, with a voice of infinite remonstrance and reproach.

She coloured and the tears came back to her eyes; I saw that it cost her a kind of anguish to take such a stand but that a dreadful sense of duty had descended upon her. It made me quite sick to find myself confronted with that particular obstacle; all the more that it appeared to me I had been extremely encouraged to leave it out of account. I almost considered that Miss Tita had assured me that if she had no greater hindrance than that——! 'You don't mean to say you made her a deathbed promise? It was precisely against your doing anything of that sort that I thought I was safe. Oh, I would rather she had burned the papers outright than that!'

'No, it isn't a promise,' said Miss Tita.

'Pray what is it then?'

She hesitated and then she said, 'She tried to burn them, but I prevented it. She had hid them in her bed.'

'In her bed?'

'Between the mattresses. That's where she put them when she took them out of the trunk. I can't understand how she did it, because Olimpia didn't help her. She tells me so and I believe her. My aunt only told her afterwards, so that she shouldn't

touch the bed—anything but the sheets. So it was badly made,’ added Miss Tita, simply.

‘I should think so! And how did she try to burn them?’

‘She didn’t try much; she was too weak, those last days. But she told me—she charged me. Oh, it was terrible! She couldn’t speak after that night; she could only make signs.’

‘And what did you do?’

‘I took them away. I locked them up.’

‘In the secretary?’

‘Yes, in the secretary,’ said Miss Tita, reddening again.

‘Did you tell her you would burn them?’

‘No, I didn’t—on purpose.’

‘On purpose to gratify me?’

‘Yes, only for that.’

‘And what good will you have done me if after all you won’t show them?’

‘Oh, none; I know that—I know that.’

‘And did she believe you had destroyed them?’

‘I don’t know what she believed at the last. I couldn’t tell—she was too far gone.’

‘Then if there was no promise and no assurance I can’t see what ties you.’

‘Oh, she hated it so—she hated it so! She was so jealous. But here’s the portrait—you may have that,’ Miss Tita announced, taking the little picture, wrapped up in the same manner in which her aunt had wrapped it, out of her pocket.

‘I may have it—do you mean you give it to me?’ I questioned, staring, as it passed into my hand.

‘Oh yes.’

‘But it’s worth money—a large sum.’

‘Well!’ said Miss Tita, still with her strange look.

I did not know what to make of it, for it could scarcely mean that she wanted to bargain like her aunt. She spoke as if she wished to make me a present. ‘I can’t take it from you as a gift,’ I said, ‘and yet I can’t afford to pay you for it according to the ideas Miss Bordereau had of its value. She rated it at a thousand pounds.’

‘Couldn’t we sell it?’ asked Miss Tita.

‘God forbid! I prefer the picture to the money.’

‘Well then keep it.’

‘You are very generous.’

‘So are you.’

‘I don’t know why you should think so,’ I replied; and this was a truthful speech, for the singular creature appeared to have some very fine reference in her mind, which I did not in the least seize.

‘Well, you have made a great difference for me,’ said Miss Tita.

I looked at Jeffrey Aspern’s face in the little picture, partly in order not to look at that of my interlocutress, which had begun to trouble me, even to frighten me a little—it was so self-conscious, so unnatural. I made no answer to this last declaration; I only privately consulted Jeffrey Aspern’s delightful eyes with my own (they were so young and brilliant, and yet so wise, so full of vision); I asked him what on earth was the matter with Miss Tita. He seemed to smile at me with friendly mockery, as if he were amused at my case. I had got into a pickle for him—as if he needed it! He was unsatisfactory, for the only moment since I had known him. Nevertheless, now that I held the little picture in my hand I felt that it would be a precious possession.



‘Is this a bribe to make me give up the papers?’ I demanded in a moment, perversely. ‘Much as I value it, if I were to be obliged to choose, the papers are what I should prefer. Ah, but ever so much!’

‘How can you choose—how can you choose?’ Miss Tita asked, slowly, lamentably.

‘I see! Of course there is nothing to be said, if you regard the interdiction that rests upon you as quite insurmountable. In this case it must seem to you that to part with them would be an impiety of the worst kind, a simple sacrilege!’

Miss Tita shook her head, full of her dolefulness. ‘You would understand if you had known her. I’m afraid,’ she quavered suddenly—‘I’m afraid! She was terrible when she was angry.’

‘Yes, I saw something of that, that night. She was terrible. Then I saw her eyes. Lord, they were fine!’

‘I see them—they stare at me in the dark!’ said Miss Tita.

‘You are nervous, with all you have been through.’

‘Oh yes, very—very!’

‘You mustn’t mind; that will pass away,’ I said, kindly. Then I added, resignedly, for it really seemed to me that I must accept the situation, ‘Well, so it is, and it can’t be helped. I must renounce.’ Miss Tita, at this, looking at me, gave a low, soft moan, and I went on: ‘I only wish to heaven she had destroyed them; then there would be nothing more to say. And I can’t understand why, with her ideas, she didn’t.’

‘Oh, she lived on them!’ said Miss Tita.

‘You can imagine whether that makes me want



less to see them,' I answered, smiling. 'But don't let me stand here as if I had it in my soul to tempt you to do anything base. Naturally you will understand I give up my rooms. I leave Venice immediately.' And I took up my hat, which I had placed on a chair. We were still there rather awkwardly, on our feet, in the middle of the sala. She had left the door of the apartments open behind her but she had not led me that way.

A kind of spasm came into her face as she saw me take my hat. 'Immediately—do you mean to-day?' The tone of the words was tragical—they were a cry of desolation.

'Oh no; not so long as I can be of the least service to you.'

'Well, just a day or two more—just two or three days,' she panted. Then controlling herself she added in another manner, 'She wanted to say something to me—the last day—something very particular, but she couldn't.'

'Something very particular?'

'Something more about the papers.'

'And did you guess—have you any idea?'

'No, I have thought—but I don't know. I have thought all kinds of things.'

'And for instance?'

'Well, that if you were a relation it would be different.'

'If I were a relation?'

'If you were not a stranger. Then it would be the same for you as for me. Anything that is mine—would be yours, and you could do what you like. I couldn't prevent you—and you would have no responsibility.'

She brought out this droll explanation with a little nervous rush, as if she were speaking words she had got by heart. They gave me an impression of subtlety and at first I failed to follow. But after a moment her face helped me to see further, and then a light came into my mind. It was embarrassing, and I bent my head over Jeffrey Aspern's portrait. What an odd expression was in his face! 'Get out of it as you can, my dear fellow!' I put the picture into the pocket of my coat and said to Miss Tita, 'Yes, I'll sell it for you. I sha'n't get a thousand pounds by any means, but I shall get something good.'

She looked at me with tears in her eyes, but she seemed to try to smile as she remarked, 'We can divide the money.'

'No, no, it shall be all yours.' Then I went on, 'I think I know what your poor aunt wanted to say. She wanted to give directions that her papers should be buried with her.'

Miss Tita appeared to consider this suggestion for a moment; after which she declared, with striking decision, 'Oh no, she wouldn't have thought that safe!'

'It seems to me nothing could be safer.'

'She had an idea that when people want to publish they are capable——' And she paused, blushing.

'Of violating a tomb? Mercy on us, what must she have thought of me!'

'She was not just, she was not generous!' Miss Tita cried with sudden passion.

The light that had come into my mind a moment before increased. 'Ah, don't say that, for we *are*

a dreadful race.' Then I pursued, 'If she left a will, that may give you some idea.'

'I have found nothing of the sort—she destroyed it. She was very fond of me,' Miss Tita added, incongruously. 'She wanted me to be happy. And if any person should be kind to me—she wanted to speak of that.'

I was almost awestricken at the astuteness with which the good lady found herself inspired, transparent astuteness as it was and sewn, as the phrase is, with white thread. 'Depend upon it she didn't want to make any provision that would be agreeable to me.'

'No, not to you but to me. She knew I should like it if you could carry out your idea. Not because she cared for you but because she did think of me,' Miss Tita went on, with her unexpected, persuasive volubility. 'You could see them—you could use them.' She stopped, seeing that I perceived the sense of that conditional—stopped long enough for me to give some sign which I did not give. She must have been conscious however that though my face showed the greatest embarrassment that was ever painted on a human countenance it was not set as a stone, it was also full of compassion. It was a comfort to me a long time afterwards to consider that she could not have seen in me the smallest symptom of disrespect. 'I don't know what to do; I'm too tormented, I'm too ashamed!' she continued, with vehemence. Then turning away from me and burying her face in her hands she burst into a flood of tears. If she did not know what to do it may be imagined whether I did any better. I stood there dumb, watching her while her sobs resounded in the great empty hall. In a moment she was facing me

again, with her streaming eyes. 'I would give you everything—and she would understand, where she is—she would forgive me!'

'Ah, Miss Tita—ah, Miss Tita,' I stammered, for all reply. I did not know what to do, as I say, but at a venture I made a wild, vague movement, in consequence of which I found myself at the door. I remember standing there and saying, 'It wouldn't do—it wouldn't do!' pensively, awkwardly, grotesquely, while I looked away to the opposite end of the sala as if there were a beautiful view there. The next thing I remember is that I was downstairs and out of the house. My gondola was there and my gondolier, reclining on the cushions, sprang up as soon as he saw me. I jumped in and to his usual '*Dove commanda?*' I replied, in a tone that made him stare, 'Anywhere, anywhere; out into the lagoon!'

He rowed me away and I sat there prostrate, groaning softly to myself, with my hat pulled over my face. What in the name of the preposterous did she mean if she did not mean to offer me her hand? That was the price—that was the price! And did she think I wanted it, poor deluded, infatuated, extravagant lady? My gondolier, behind me, must have seen my ears red as I wondered, sitting there under the fluttering *tenda*, with my hidden face, noticing nothing as we passed—wondered whether her delusion, her infatuation had been my own reckless work. Did she think I had made love to her, even to get the papers? I had not, I had not; I repeated that over to myself for an hour, for two hours, till I was wearied if not convinced. I don't know where my gondolier took me; we floated aimlessly about on the lagoon, with slow, rare strokes. At last I became conscious

that we were near the Lido, far up, on the right hand, as you turn your back to Venice, and I made him put me ashore. I wanted to walk, to move, to shed some of my bewilderment. I crossed the narrow strip and got to the sea-beach—I took my way toward Malamocco. But presently I flung myself down again on the warm sand, in the breeze, on the coarse dry grass. It took it out of me to think I had been so much at fault, that I had unwittingly but none the less deplorably trifled. But I had not given her cause—distinctly I had not. I had said to Mrs. Prest that I would make love to her; but it had been a joke without consequences and I had never said it to Tita Bordereau. I had been as kind as possible, because I really liked her; but since when had that become a crime where a woman of such an age and such an appearance was concerned? I am far from remembering clearly the succession of events and feelings during this long day of confusion, which I spent entirely in wandering about, without going home, until late at night; it only comes back to me that there were moments when I pacified my conscience and others when I lashed it into pain. I did not laugh all day—that I do recollect; the case, however it might have struck others, seemed to me so little amusing. It would have been better perhaps for me to feel the comic side of it. At any rate, whether I had given cause or not it went without saying that I could not pay the price. I could not accept. I could not, for a bundle of tattered papers, marry a ridiculous, pathetic, provincial old woman. It was a proof that she did not think the idea would come to me, her having determined to suggest it herself in that practical, argumentative, heroic way, in

which the timidity however had been so much more striking than the boldness that her reasons appeared to come first and her feelings afterward.

As the day went on I grew to wish that I had never heard of Aspern's relics, and I cursed the extravagant curiosity that had put John Cumnor on the scent of them. We had more than enough material without them and my predicament was the just punishment of that most fatal of human follies, our not having known when to stop. It was very well to say it was no predicament, that the way out was simple, that I had only to leave Venice by the first train in the morning, after writing a note to Miss Tita, to be placed in her hand as soon as I got clear of the house ; for it was a strong sign that I was embarrassed that when I tried to make up the note in my mind in advance (I would put it on paper as soon as I got home, before going to bed), I could not think of anything but ' How can I thank you for the rare confidence you have placed in me ? ' That would never do ; it sounded exactly as if an acceptance were to follow. Of course I might go away without writing a word, but that would be brutal and my idea was still to exclude brutal solutions. As my confusion cooled I was lost in wonder at the importance I had attached to Miss Bordereau's crumpled scraps ; the thought of them became odious to me and I was as vexed with the old witch for the superstition that had prevented her from destroying them as I was with myself for having already spent more money than I could afford in attempting to control their fate. I forget what I did, where I went after leaving the Lido and at what hour or with what recovery of composure I made my



way back to my boat. I only know that in the afternoon, when the air was aglow with the sunset, I was standing before the church of Saints John and Paul and looking up at the small square-jawed face of Bartolommeo Colleoni, the terrible *condottiere* who sits so sturdily astride of his huge bronze horse, on the high pedestal on which Venetian gratitude maintains him. The statue is incomparable, the finest of all mounted figures, unless that of Marcus Aurelius, who rides benignant before the Roman Capitol, be finer: but I was not thinking of that; I only found myself staring at the triumphant captain as if he had an oracle on his lips. The western light shines into all his grimness at that hour and makes it wonderfully personal. But he continued to look far over my head, at the red immersion of another day—he had seen so many go down into the lagoon through the centuries—and if he were thinking of battles and stratagems they were of a different quality from any I had to tell him of. He could not direct me what to do, gaze up at him as I might. Was it before this or after that I wandered about for an hour in the small canals, to the continued stupefaction of my gondolier, who had never seen me so restless and yet so void of a purpose and could extract from me no order but ‘Go anywhere—everywhere—all over the place’? He reminded me that I had not lunched and expressed therefore respectfully the hope that I would dine earlier. He had had long periods of leisure during the day, when I had left the boat and rambled, so that I was not obliged to consider him, and I told him that that day, for a change, I would touch no meat. It was an effect of poor Miss Tita’s proposal, not altogether auspicious, that I



had quite lost my appetite. I don't know why it happened that on this occasion I was more than ever struck with that queer air of sociability, of cousinship and family life, which makes up half the expression of Venice. Without streets and vehicles, the uproar of wheels, the brutality of horses, and with its little winding ways where people crowd together, where voices sound as in the corridors of a house, where the human step circulates as if it skirted the angles of furniture and shoes never wear out, the place has the character of an immense collective apartment, in which Piazza San Marco is the most ornamented corner and palaces and churches, for the rest, play the part of great divans of repose, tables of entertainment, expanses of decoration. And somehow the splendid common domicile, familiar, domestic and resonant, also resembles a theatre, with actors clicking over bridges and, in straggling processions, tripping along fondamentas. As you sit in your gondola the footways that in certain parts edge the canals assume to the eye the importance of a stage, meeting it at the same angle, and the Venetian figures, moving to and fro against the battered scenery of their little houses of comedy, strike you as members of an endless dramatic troupe.

I went to bed that night very tired, without being able to compose a letter to Miss Tita. Was this failure the reason why I became conscious the next morning as soon as I awoke of a determination to see the poor lady again the first moment she would receive me? That had something to do with it, but what had still more was the fact that during my sleep a very odd revulsion had taken place in my spirit. I found myself aware of this almost as soon

as I opened my eyes ; it made me jump out of my bed with the movement of a man who remembers that he has left the house-door ajar or a candle burning under a shelf. Was I still in time to save my goods ? That question was in my heart ; for what had now come to pass was that in the unconscious cerebration of sleep I had swung back to a passionate appreciation of Miss Bordereau's papers. They were now more precious than ever and a kind of ferocity had come into my desire to possess them. The condition Miss Tita had attached to the possession of them no longer appeared an obstacle worth thinking of, and for an hour, that morning, my repentant imagination brushed it aside. It was absurd that I should be able to invent nothing ; absurd to renounce so easily and turn away helpless from the idea that the only way to get hold of the papers was to unite myself to her for life. I would not unite myself and yet I would have them. I must add that by the time I sent down to ask if she would see me I had invented no alternative, though to do so I had had all the time that I was dressing. This failure was humiliating, yet what could the alternative be ? Miss Tita sent back word that I might come ; and as I descended the stairs and crossed the sala to her door—this time she received me in her aunt's forlorn parlour—I hoped she would not think my errand was to tell her I accepted her hand. She certainly would have made the day before the reflection that I declined it.

As soon as I came into the room I saw that she had drawn this inference, but I also saw something which had not been in my forecast. Poor Miss Tita's sense of her failure had produced an extraordinary

alteration in her, but I had been too full of my literary concupiscence to think of that. Now I perceived it ; I can scarcely tell how it startled me. She stood in the middle of the room with a face of mildness bent upon me, and her look of forgiveness, of absolution made her angelic. It beautified her ; she was younger ; she was not a ridiculous old woman. This optical trick gave her a sort of phantasmagoric brightness, and while I was still the victim of it I heard a whisper somewhere in the depths of my conscience : ‘Why not, after all—why not?’ It seemed to me I was ready to pay the price. Still more distinctly however than the whisper I heard Miss Tita’s own voice. I was so struck with the different effect she made upon me that at first I was not clearly aware of what she was saying ; then I perceived she had bade me good-bye—she said something about hoping I should be very happy.

‘Good-bye—good-bye?’ I repeated, with an inflection interrogative and probably foolish.

I saw she did not feel the interrogation, she only heard the words ; she had strung herself up to accepting our separation and they fell upon her ear as a proof. ‘Are you going to-day?’ she asked. ‘But it doesn’t matter, for whenever you go I shall not see you again. I don’t want to.’ And she smiled strangely, with an infinite gentleness. She had never doubted that I had left her the day before in horror. How could she, since I had not come back before night to contradict, even as a simple form, such an idea? And now she had the force of soul—Miss Tita with force of soul was a new conception—to smile at me in her humiliation.

‘What shall you do—where shall you go?’ I asked.

‘Oh, I don’t know. I have done the great thing. I have destroyed the papers.’

‘Destroyed them?’ I faltered.

‘Yes; what was I to keep them for? I burnt them last night, one by one, in the kitchen.’

‘One by one?’ I repeated, mechanically.

‘It took a long time—there were so many.’ The room seemed to go round me as she said this and a real darkness for a moment descended upon my eyes. When it passed Miss Tita was there still, but the transfiguration was over and she had changed back to a plain, dingy, elderly person. It was in this character she spoke as she said, ‘I can’t stay with you longer, I can’t;’ and it was in this character that she turned her back upon me, as I had turned mine upon her twenty-four hours before, and moved to the door of her room. Here she did what I had not done when I quitted her—she paused long enough to give me one look. I have never forgotten it and I sometimes still suffer from it, though it was not resentful. No, there was no resentment, nothing hard or vindictive in poor Miss Tita; for when, later, I sent her in exchange for the portrait of Jeffrey Aspern a larger sum of money than I had hoped to be able to gather for her, writing to her that I had sold the picture, she kept it with thanks; she never sent it back. I wrote to her that I had sold the picture, but I admitted to Mrs. Prest, at the time (I met her in London, in the autumn), that it hangs above my writing-table. When I look at it my chagrin at the loss of the letters becomes almost intolerable.



LOUISA PALLANT





# LOUISA PALLANT

## I

NEVER say you know the last word about any human heart! I was once treated to a revelation which startled and touched me, in the nature of a person with whom I had been acquainted (well, as I supposed) for years, whose character I had had good reasons, heaven knows, to appreciate and in regard to whom I flattered myself that I had nothing more to learn.

It was on the terrace of the Kursaal at Homburg, nearly ten years ago, one lovely night toward the end of July. I had come to the place that day from Frankfort, with vague intentions, and was mainly occupied in waiting for my young nephew, the only son of my sister, who had been intrusted to my care by a very fond mother for the summer (I was expected to show him Europe—only the very best of it), and was on his way from Paris to join me. The excellent band discoursed music not too abstruse, and the air was filled besides with the murmur of different languages, the smoke of many cigars, the creak on the gravel of the gardens of strolling shoes and the thick tinkle of beer-glasses. There were a hundred

people walking about, there were some in clusters at little tables and many on benches and rows of chairs, watching the others as if they had paid for the privilege and were rather disappointed. I was among these last ; I sat by myself, smoking my cigar and thinking of nothing very particular while families and couples passed and repassed me.

I scarcely know how long I had sat there when I became aware of a recognition which made my meditations definite. It was on my own part, and the object of it was a lady who moved to and fro, unconscious of my observation, with a young girl at her side. I had not seen her for ten years, and what first struck me was the fact not that she was Mrs. Henry Pallant but that the girl who was with her was remarkably pretty—or rather first of all that every one who passed her turned round to look at her. This led me to look at the young lady myself, and her charming face diverted my attention for some time from that of her companion. The latter, moreover, though it was night, wore a thin, light veil which made her features vague. The couple walked and walked, slowly, but though they were very quiet and decorous, and also very well dressed, they seemed to have no friends. Every one looked at them but no one spoke ; they appeared even to talk very little to each other. Moreover they bore with extreme composure and as if they were thoroughly used to it the attention they excited. I am afraid it occurred to me to take for granted that they were not altogether honourable and that if they had been the elder lady would have covered the younger up a little more from the public stare and not have been so ashamed to exhibit her own face. Perhaps this question came

into my mind too easily just then—in view of my prospective mentorship to my nephew. If I was to show him only the best of Europe I should have to be very careful about the people he should meet—especially the ladies—and the relations he should form. I suspected him of knowing very little of life and I was rather uneasy about my responsibilities. Was I completely relieved and reassured when I perceived that I simply had Louisa Pallant before me and that the girl was her daughter Linda, whom I had known as a child—Linda grown up into a regular beauty?

The question is delicate and the proof that I was not very sure is perhaps that I forbore to speak to the ladies immediately. I watched them awhile—I wondered what they would do. No great harm, assuredly; but I was anxious to see if they were really isolated. Homburg is a great resort of the English—the London season takes up its tale there toward the first of August—and I had an idea that in such a company as that Louisa would naturally know people. It was my impression that she ‘cultivated’ the English, that she had been much in London and would be likely to have views in regard to a permanent settlement there. This supposition was quickened by the sight of Linda’s beauty, for I knew there is no country in which a handsome person is more appreciated. You will see that I took time, and I confess that as I finished my cigar I thought it all over. There was no good reason in fact why I should have rushed into Mrs. Pallant’s arms. She had not treated me well and we had never really made it up. Somehow even the circumstance that (after the first soreness) I was glad to have lost her had never put

us quite right with each other ; nor, for herself, had it made her less ashamed of her heartless behaviour that poor Pallant after all turned out no great catch. I had forgiven her ; I had not felt that it was anything but an escape not to have married a girl who had it in her to take back her given word and break a fellow's heart, for mere flesh-pots—or the shallow promise, as it pitifully proved, of flesh-pots ; moreover we had met since then, on the occasion of my former visit to Europe ; we had looked each other in the eyes, we had pretended to be free friends and had talked of the wickedness of the world as composedly as if we were the only just, the only pure. I knew then what she had given out—that I had driven her off by my insane jealousy before she ever thought of Henry Pallant, before she had ever seen him. This had not been then and it could not be to-day a ground of real reunion, especially if you add to it that she knew perfectly what I thought of her. It is my belief that it does not often minister to friendship that your friend shall know your real opinion, for he knows it mainly when it is unfavourable, and this is especially the case when (if the solecism may pass) he is a woman. I had not followed Mrs. Pallant's fortunes ; the years elapsed, for me, in my own country, whereas she led her life, which I vaguely believed to be difficult after her husband's death—virtually that of a bankrupt—in foreign lands. I heard of her from time to time ; always as 'established' somewhere, but on each occasion in a different place. She drifted from country to country, and if she had been of a hard composition at the beginning it could never occur to me that her struggle with society, as it might be called, would

have softened the paste. Whenever I heard a woman spoken of as 'horribly worldly' I thought immediately of the object of my early passion. I imagined she had debts, and when I now at last made up my mind to recall myself to her it was present to me that she might ask me to lend her money. More than anything else, at this time of day, I was sorry for her, so that such an idea did not operate as a deterrent.

She pretended afterwards that she had not noticed me—expressing great surprise and wishing to know where I had dropped from; but I think the corner of her eye had taken me in and she was waiting to see what I would do. She had ended by sitting down with her girl on the same row of chairs with myself, and after a little, on the seat next to her becoming vacant, I went and stood before her. She looked up at me a moment, staring, as if she could not imagine who I was or what I wanted; then, smiling and extending her hands, she broke out, 'Ah, my dear old friend—what a delight!' If she had waited to see what I would do, in order to choose her own line, she at least carried out this line with the utmost grace. She was cordial, friendly, artless, interested, and indeed I am sure she was very glad to see me. I may as well say immediately, however, that she gave neither then nor later any sign of a disposition to borrow money. She had none too much—that I learned—but for the moment she seemed able to pay her way. I took the empty chair and we remained talking for an hour. After a while she made me sit on the other side of her, next to her daughter, whom she wished to know me—to love me—as one of their oldest friends. 'It goes

back, back, back, doesn't it?' said Mrs. Pallant; 'and of course she remembers you as a child.' Linda smiled very sweetly and indefinitely, and I saw she remembered me not at all. When her mother intimated that they had often talked about me she failed to take it up, though she looked extremely nice. Looking nice was her strong point; she was prettier even than her mother had been. She was such a little lady that she made me ashamed of having doubted, however vaguely and for a moment, of her position in the scale of propriety. Her appearance seemed to say that if she had no acquaintances, it was because she did not want to—because there was nobody there who struck her as attractive: there was not the slightest difficulty about her choosing her friends. Linda Pallant, young as she was, and fresh and fair and charming and gentle and sufficiently shy, looked somehow exclusive—as if the dust of the common world had never been meant to settle upon her. She was simpler than her mother and was evidently not a young woman of professions—except in so far as she was committed to an interest in you by her bright, pure, intelligent smile. A girl who had such a lovely way of showing her teeth could never pass for heartless.

As I sat between the pair I felt that I had been taken possession of and that for better or worse my stay at Homburg would be intimately associated with theirs. We gave each other a great deal of news and expressed unlimited interest in each other's history since our last meeting. I know not what Mrs. Pallant kept back, but for myself I was frank enough. She let me see at any rate that her life had been a good deal what I supposed, though the terms she used to



describe it were less crude than those of my thought. She confessed that they had drifted and that they were drifting still. Her narrative rambled and got what is vulgarly called somewhat mixed, as I thought Linda perceived while she sat watching the passers in a manner which betrayed no consciousness of their attention, without coming to her mother's aid. Once or twice Mrs. Pallant made me feel like a cross-questioner, which I had no intention of being. I took it that if the girl never put in a word it was because she had perfect confidence in her mother's ability to come out straight. It was suggested to me, I scarcely knew how, that this confidence between the two ladies went to a great length; that their union of thought, their system of reciprocal divination, was remarkable, and that they probably seldom needed to resort to the clumsy and in some cases dangerous expedient of putting their ideas into words. I suppose I made this reflection not all at once—it was not wholly the result of that first meeting. I was with them constantly for the next several days and my impressions had time to clarify.

I do remember however that it was on this first evening that Archie's name came up. She attributed her own stay at Homburg to no refined nor exalted motive—did not say that she was there because she always came or because a high medical authority had ordered her to drink the waters; she frankly admitted that the reason of her visit had been simply that she did not know where else to turn. But she appeared to assume that my behaviour rested on higher grounds and even that it required explanation, the place being frivolous and modern—devoid of that interest of antiquity which I used to value. 'Don't

you remember—ever so long ago—that you wouldn't look at anything in Europe that was not a thousand years old? Well, as we advance in life I suppose we don't think that's quite such a charm.' And when I told her that I had come to Homburg because it was as good a place as another to wait for my nephew, she exclaimed: 'Your nephew—what nephew? He must have come up of late.' I answered that he was a youth named Archer Pringle and very modern indeed; he was coming of age in a few months and was in Europe for the first time. My last news of him had been from Paris and I was expecting to hear from him from one day to the other. His father was dead, and though a selfish bachelor, little versed in the care of children, I was considerably counted on by his mother to see that he did not smoke too much nor fall off an Alp.

Mrs. Pallant immediately guessed that his mother was my sister Charlotte, whom she spoke of familiarly, though I knew she had seen her but once or twice. Then in a moment it came to her which of the Pringles Charlotte had married; she remembered the family perfectly, in the old New York days—'that disgustingly rich lot.' She said it was very nice having the boy come out that way to my care; to which I replied that it was very nice for him. She declared that she meant for me—I ought to have had children; there was something so parental about me and I would have brought them up so well. She could make an allusion like that—to all that might have been and had not been—without a gleam of guilt in her eye; and I foresaw that before I left the place I should have confided to her that though I detested her and was very glad we had fallen out, yet our old

relations had left me no heart for marrying another woman. If I was a maundering old bachelor to-day it was no one's fault but hers. She asked me what I meant to do with my nephew and I said it was much more a question of what he would do with me. She inquired whether he were a nice young man and had brothers and sisters and any particular profession. I told her that I had really seen but little of him ; I believed him to be six feet high and of tolerable parts. He was an only son, but there was a little sister at home, a delicate, unsuccessful child, demanding all the mother's care.

'So that makes your responsibility greater, as it were, about the boy, doesn't it?' said Mrs. Pallant.

'Greater? I'm sure I don't know.'

'Why, if the girl's life is uncertain he may be, some moment, all the mother has. So that being in your hands——'

'Oh, I shall keep him alive, I suppose, if you mean that,' I rejoined.

'Well, *we* won't kill him, shall we, Linda?' Mrs. Pallant went on, with a laugh.

'I don't know—perhaps we shall!' said the girl, smiling.

## II

I CALLED on them the next day at their lodgings, the modesty of which was enhanced by a hundred pretty feminine devices—flowers and photographs and portable knick-knacks and a hired piano and morsels of old brocade flung over angular sofas. I asked them to drive ; I met them again at the Kur-saal ; I arranged that we should dine together, after the Homburg fashion, at the same *table d'hôte* ; and during several days this revived familiar intercourse continued, imitating intimacy if it did not quite achieve it. I liked it, for my companions passed my time for me and the conditions of our life were soothing—the feeling of summer and shade and music and leisure, in the German gardens and woods, where we strolled and sat and gossiped ; to which may be added a kind of sociable sense that among people whose challenge to the curiosity was mainly not irresistible we kept quite to ourselves. We were on the footing of old friends who, with regard to each other, still had discoveries to make. We knew each other's nature but we did not know each other's experience ; so that when Mrs. Pallant related to me what she had been 'up to' (as I called it) for so many years, the former knowledge attached a hundred inter-

pretative footnotes (as if I had been editing an author who presented difficulties) to the interesting page. There was nothing new to me in the fact that I did not esteem her, but there was a sort of refreshment in finding that this was not necessary at Homburg and that I could like her in spite of it. She seemed to me, in the oddest way, both improved and degenerate, as if in her nature the two processes had gone on together. She was battered and world-worn and, spiritually speaking, vulgarised ; something fresh had rubbed off her (it even included the vivacity of her early desire to do the best thing for herself), and something very stale had rubbed on. On the other hand she betrayed a scepticism, and that was rather becoming, as it quenched the eagerness of her prime, which had taken a form so unfortunate for me. She had grown weary and indifferent, and as she struck me as having seen more of the evil of the world than of the good, that was a gain ; in other words the cynicism that had formed itself in her nature had a softer surface than some of her old ambitions. And then I had to recognise that her devotion to her daughter had been a kind of religion ; she had done the very best possible for Linda.

Linda was curious—Linda was interesting ; I have seen girls I liked better (charming as she was), but I have never seen one who for the time I was with her (the impression passed, somehow, when she was out of sight) occupied me more. I can best describe the sort of attention that she excited by saying that she struck one above all things as a final product—just as some plant or fruit does, some waxen orchid or some perfect peach. More than any girl I ever saw she was the result of a process of calculation ; a

process patiently educative ; a pressure exerted in order that she should reach a high point. This high point had been the star of her mother's heaven (it hung before her so definitely), and had been the source of the only light—in default of a better—that shone upon the poor lady's path. It stood her in stead of every other religion. The very most and the very best—that was what the girl had been led on to achieve ; I mean, of course (for no real miracle had been wrought), the most and the best that she was capable of. She was as pretty, as graceful, as intelligent, as well-bred, as well-informed, as well-dressed, as it would have been possible for her to be ; her music, her singing, her German, her French, her English, her step, her tone, her glance, her manner, and everything in her person and movement, from the shade and twist of her hair to the way you saw her finger-nails were pink when she raised her hand, had been carried so far that one found one's self accepting them as a kind of standard. I regarded her as a model, and yet it was a part of her perfection that she had none of the stiffness of a pattern. If she held the observation it was because one wondered where and when she would break down ; but she never did, either in her French accent or in her *rôle* of educated angel.

After Archie had come the ladies were manifestly a great resource to him, and all the world knows that a party of four is more convenient than a party of three. My nephew kept me waiting a week, with a placidity all his own ; but this same placidity was an element of success in our personal relations—so long, that is, as I did not lose my temper with it. I did not, for the most part, because my young man's



unsurprised acceptance of the most various forms of good fortune had more than anything else the effect of amusing me. I had seen little of him for the last three or four years. I knew not what his impending majority would have made of him (he did not look himself in the least as if the wind were rising), and I watched him with a solicitude which usually ended in a joke. He was a tall, fresh-coloured youth, with a candid circular countenance and a love of cigarettes, horses and boats which had not been sacrificed to more transcendent studies. He was refreshingly natural, in a supercivilised age, and I soon made up my mind that the formula of his character was a certain simplifying serenity. After that I had time to meditate on the line which divides the serene from the inane and simplification from death. Archie was not clever—that theory it was not possible to maintain, though Mrs. Pallant tried it once or twice; but on the other hand it seemed to me that his want of wit was a good defensive weapon. It was not the sort of density that would let him in, but the sort that would keep him out. By which I don't mean that he had shortsighted suspicions, but on the contrary that imagination would never be needed to save him, because she would never put him in danger. In short he was a well-grown, well-washed, muscular young American, whose extreme good-nature might have made him pass for conceited. If he looked pleased with himself it was only because he was pleased with life (as well he might be, with the money he was on the point of stepping into), and his big healthy, independent person was an inevitable part of that. I am bound to add that he was accommodating—for which I was grateful. His own habits were active, but he



did not insist on my adopting them and he made noteworthy sacrifices for the sake of my society. When I say for the sake of mine I must of course remember that mine and that of Mrs. Pallant and Linda were now very much the same thing. He was willing to sit and smoke for hours under the trees or, regulating his long legs to the pace of his three companions, stroll through the nearer woods of the charming little hill-range of the Taunus to those rustic *Wirthschaften* where coffee might be drunk under a trellis.

Mrs. Pallant took a great interest in him ; she talked a great deal about him and thought him a delightful specimen, as a young gentleman of his period and country. She even asked me the sort of 'figure' that his fortune might really amount to and expressed the most hungry envy when I told her what I supposed it to be. While we talked together Archie, on his side, could not do less than converse with Linda, nor to tell the truth did he manifest the least inclination for any different exercise. They strolled away together while their elders rested ; two or three times, in the evening, when the ballroom of the Kursaal was lighted and dance-music played, they whirled over the smooth floor in a waltz that made me remember. Whether it had the same effect on Mrs. Pallant I know not, for she held her peace. We had on certain occasions our moments, almost our half-hours, of unembarrassed silence while our young companions disported themselves. But if at other times her inquiries and comments were numerous on the subject of my ingenuous kinsman this might very well have passed for a courteous recognition of the frequent admiration that I expressed for

Linda—an admiration to which I noticed that she was apt to give but a small direct response. I was struck with something anomalous in her way of taking my remarks about her daughter—they produced so little of a maternal flutter. Her detachment, her air of having no fatuous illusions and not being blinded by prejudice seemed to me at times to amount to an affectation. Either she answered me with a vague, slightly impatient sigh and changed the subject, or else she said before doing so: ‘Oh yes, yes, she’s a very brilliant creature. She ought to be; God knows what I have done for her!’

The reader will have perceived that I am fond of looking at the explanations of things, and in regard to this I had my theory that she was disappointed in the girl. What had been her particular disappointment? As she could not possibly have wished her prettier or more pleasing it could only be that Linda had not made a successful use of her gifts. Had she expected her to capture a prince the day after she left the schoolroom? After all there was plenty of time for this, as Linda was only two and twenty. It did not occur to me to wonder whether the source of her mother’s tepidity was that the young lady had not turned out so nice a nature as she had hoped, because in the first place Linda struck me as perfectly innocent and in the second I was not paid, as the French say, for thinking that Louisa Pallant would much mind whether she were or not. The last hypothesis I should have resorted to was that of private despair at bad moral symptoms. And in relation to Linda’s nature I had before me the daily spectacle of her manner with my nephew. It was as charming as it could be, without the smallest indication of a

desire to lead him on. She was as familiar as a cousin, but as a distant one—a cousin who had been brought up to observe degrees. She was so much cleverer than Archie that she could not help laughing at him, but she did not laugh enough to exclude variety, being well aware, no doubt, that a woman's cleverness most shines in contrast with a man's stupidity when she pretends to take that stupidity for wisdom. Linda Pallant moreover was not a chatter-box ; as she knew the value of many things she knew the value of intervals. There were a good many in the conversation of these young persons ; my nephew's own speech, to say nothing of his thought, being not exempt from periods of repose ; so that I sometimes wondered how their association was kept at that pitch of friendliness of which it certainly bore the stamp.

It was friendly enough, evidently, when Archie sat near her—near enough for low murmurs, if they had risen to his lips—and watched her with interested eyes and with liberty not to try too hard to make himself agreeable. She was always doing something—finishing a flower in a piece of tapestry, cutting the leaves of a magazine, sewing a button on her glove (she carried a little work-bag in her pocket and was a person of the daintiest habits), or plying her pencil in a sketchbook which she rested on her knee. When we were indoors, at her mother's house, she had always the resource of her piano, of which she was of course a perfect mistress. These avocations enabled her to bear such close inspection with composure (I ended by rebuking Archie for it—I told him he stared at the poor girl too much), and she sought further relief in smiling all over the

place. When my young man's eyes shone at her those of Miss Pallant addressed themselves brightly to the trees and clouds and other surrounding objects, including her mother and me. Sometimes she broke out into a sudden embarrassed, happy, pointless laugh. When she wandered away from us she looked back at us in a manner which said that it was not for long—that she was with us still in spirit. If I was pleased with her it was for a good reason : it was many a day since any pretty girl had had the air of taking me so much into account. Sometimes, when they were so far away as not to disturb us, she read aloud a little to Mr. Archie. I don't know where she got her books—I never provided them, and certainly he did not. He was no reader and I daresay he went to sleep.

### III

I REMEMBER well the first time—it was at the end of about ten days of this—that Mrs. Pallant remarked to me: ‘My dear friend, you are quite amazing! You behave for all the world as if you were perfectly ready to accept certain consequences.’ She nodded in the direction of our young companions, but I nevertheless put her at the pains of saying what consequences she meant. ‘What consequences?’ she repeated. ‘Why, the consequences that ensued when you and I first became acquainted.’

I hesitated a moment and then, looking her in the eyes, I said, ‘Do you mean that she would throw him over?’

‘You are not kind, you are not generous,’ she replied, colouring quickly. ‘I am giving you a warning.’

‘You mean that my boy may fall in love with her?’

‘Certainly. It looks even as if the harm might be already done.’

‘Then your warning is too late,’ I said, smiling. ‘But why do you call it a harm?’

‘Haven’t you any sense of responsibility?’ she asked. ‘Is that what his mother sent him out to

you for—that you should find him a wife—let him put his head into a noose the day after his arrival?’

‘Heaven forbid I should do anything of the kind! I know moreover that his mother doesn’t want him to marry young. She thinks it’s a mistake and that at that age a man never really chooses. He doesn’t choose till he has lived awhile—till he has looked about and compared.’

‘And what do you think yourself?’

‘I should like to say I consider that love itself, however young, is a sufficient choice. But my being a bachelor at this time of day would contradict me too much.’

‘Well then, you’re too primitive. You ought to leave this place to-morrow.’

‘So as not to see Archie tumble in?’

‘You ought to fish him out now and take him with you.’

‘Do you think he is in very far?’ I inquired.

‘If I were his mother I know what I should think. I can put myself in her place—I am not narrow—I know perfectly well how she must regard such a question.’

‘And don’t you know that in America that’s not thought important—the way the mother regards it?’

Mrs. Pallant was silent a moment, as if I partly mystified and partly vexed her. ‘Well, we are not in America; we happen to be here.’

‘No; my poor sister is up to her neck in New York.’

‘I am almost capable of writing to her to come out,’ said Mrs. Pallant.

‘You *are* warning me,’ I exclaimed, ‘but I hardly

know of what. It seems to me that my responsibility would begin only at the moment when it should appear that your daughter herself was in danger.'

'Oh, you needn't mind that; I'll take care of her.'

'If you think she is in danger already I'll take him away to-morrow,' I went on.

'It would be the best thing you could do.'

'I don't know. I should be very sorry to act on a false alarm. I am very well here; I like the place and the life and your society. Besides, it doesn't strike me that—on her side—there is anything.'

She looked at me with an expression that I had never seen in her face, and if I had puzzled her she repaid me in kind. 'You are very annoying; you don't deserve what I would do for you.'

What she would do for me she did not tell me that day, but we took up the subject again. I said to her that I did not really see why we should assume that a girl like Linda—brilliant enough to make one of the greatest matches—would fall into my nephew's arms. Might I inquire whether her mother had won a confession from her—whether she had stammered out her secret? Mrs. Pallant answered that they did not need to tell each other such things—they had not lived together twenty years in such intimacy for nothing. To this I rejoined that I had guessed as much but that there might be an exception for a great occasion like the present. If Linda had shown nothing it was a sign that for her the occasion was not great; and I mentioned that Archie had not once spoken to me of the young lady, save to remark casually and rather patronisingly, after his first encounter with her, that



she was a regular little flower. (The little flower was nearly three years older than himself.) Apart from this he had not alluded to her and had taken up no allusion of mine. Mrs. Pallant informed me again (for which I was prepared) that I was quite too primitive; and then she said: 'We needn't discuss the matter if you don't wish to, but I happen to know—how I obtained my knowledge is not important—that the moment Mr. Pringle should propose to my daughter she would gobble him down. Surely it's a detail worth mentioning to you.'

'Very good. I will sound him. I will look into the matter to-night.'

'Don't, don't; you will spoil everything!' she murmured, in a peculiar tone of discouragement. 'Take him off—that's the only thing.'

I did not at all like the idea of taking him off; it seemed too summary, unnecessarily violent, even if presented to him on specious grounds; and, moreover, as I had told Mrs. Pallant, I really had no wish to move. I did not consider it a part of my bargain with my sister that, with my middle-aged habits, I should duck and dodge about Europe. So I said: 'Should you really object to the boy so much as a son-in-law? After all he's a good fellow and a gentleman.'

'My poor friend, you are too superficial—too frivolous,' Mrs. Pallant rejoined, with considerable bitterness.

There was a vibration of contempt in this which nettled me, so that I exclaimed, 'Possibly; but it seems odd that a lesson in consistency should come from you.'

I had no retort from her ; but at last she said, quietly : ' I think Linda and I had better go away. We have been here a month—that's enough.'

' Dear me, that will be a bore !' I ejaculated ; and for the rest of the evening, until we separated (our conversation had taken place after dinner, at the Kursaal), she remained almost silent, with a subdued, injured air. This, somehow, did not soothe me, as it ought to have done, for it was too absurd that Louisa Pallant, of all women, should propose to put me in the wrong. If ever a woman had been in the wrong herself——! Archie and I usually attended the ladies back to their own door—they lived in a street of minor accommodation, at a certain distance from the Rooms—and we parted for the night late, on the big cobble-stones, in the little sleeping German town, under the closed windows of which, suggesting stuffy interiors, our English farewells sounded gay. On this occasion however they were not gay, for the difficulty that had come up, for me, with Mrs. Pallant appeared to have extended by a mysterious sympathy to the young couple. They too were rather conscious and dumb.

As I walked back to our hotel with my nephew I passed my hand into his arm and asked him, by no roundabout approach to the question, whether he were in serious peril of love.

' I don't know, I don't know—really, uncle, I don't know !'—this was all the satisfaction I could extract from the youth, who had not the smallest vein of introspection. He might not know, but before we reached the inn (we had a few more words on the subject), it seemed to me that I did. His mind

was not made to contain many objects at once, but Linda Pallant for the moment certainly constituted its principal furniture. She pervaded his consciousness, she solicited his curiosity, she associated herself, in a manner as yet undefined and unformulated, with his future. I could see that she was the first intensely agreeable impression of his life. I did not betray to him, however, how much I saw, and I slept not particularly well, for thinking that, after all, it had been none of my business to provide him with intensely agreeable impressions. To find him a wife was the last thing that his mother had expected of me or that I had expected of myself. Moreover it was quite my opinion that he himself was too young to be a judge of wives. Mrs. Pallant was right and I had been strangely superficial in regarding her, with her beautiful daughter, as a 'resource.' There were other resources and one of them would be most decidedly to go away. What did I know after all about the girl except that I was very glad to have escaped from marrying her mother? That mother, it was true, was a singular person, and it was strange that her conscience should have begun to fidget before my own did and that she was more anxious on my nephew's behalf than I was. The ways of women were mysterious and it was not a novelty to me that one never knew where one would find them. As I have not hesitated in this narrative to reveal the irritable side of my own nature I will confess that I even wondered whether Mrs. Pallant's solicitude had not been a deeper artifice. Was it not possibly a plan of her own for making sure of my young man—though I did not quite see the logic of it? If she regarded him, as she might in view of his large

fortune, as a great catch, might she not have arranged this little comedy, in their personal interest, with the girl ?

That possibility at any rate only made it a happier thought that I should carry the boy away to visit other cities. There were many assuredly much more worthy of his attention than Homburg. In the course of the morning (it was after our early luncheon) I walked round to Mrs. Pallant's, to let her know that this truth had come over me with force ; and while I did so I again felt the unlikelihood of the part attributed by my fears and by the mother's own, if they were real, to Linda. Certainly if she was such a girl as these fears represented her she would fly at higher game. It was with an eye to high game, Mrs. Pallant had frankly admitted to me, that she had been trained, and such an education, to say nothing of such a subject, justified a hope of greater returns. A young American who could give her nothing but pocket-money was a very moderate prize, and if she were prepared to marry for ambition (there was no such hardness in her face or tone, but then there never is), her mark would be at the least an English duke. I was received at Mrs. Pallant's lodgings with the announcement that she had left Homburg with her daughter half an hour before. The good woman who had entertained the pair professed to know nothing of their movements beyond the fact that they had gone to Frankfort, where however it was her belief that they did not intend to remain. They were evidently travelling beyond. Sudden? Oh yes, tremendously sudden. They must have spent the night in packing, they had so many things and such pretty ones ; and their poor

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maid all the morning had scarcely had time to swallow her coffee. But they evidently were ladies accustomed to come and go. It did not matter : with such rooms as hers she never wanted ; there was a new family coming in at three o'clock.

#### IV

THIS piece of strategy left me staring and I confess it made me rather angry. My only consolation was that Archie, when I told him, looked as blank as myself and that the trick touched him more nearly, for I was not in love with Louisa. We agreed that we required an explanation and we pretended to expect one the next day in the shape of a letter satisfactory even to the point of being apologetic. When I say 'we' pretended I mean that I did, for my suspicion that he knew (through an arrangement with Linda) what had become of our friends lasted only a moment. If his resentment was less than my own his surprise was equally great. I had been willing to bolt, but I felt rather slighted by the facility with which Mrs. Pallant had shown that she could part with us. Archie was not angry, because in the first place he was good-natured and in the second it was evidently not definite to him that he had been encouraged, having, I think, no very particular idea of what constituted encouragement. He was fresh from the wonderful country in which between the ingenuous young there may be so little question of 'intentions.' He was but dimly conscious of his own and would have had no opinion as to

whether he had been provoked or jilted. I had no wish to exasperate him, but when at the end of three days more we were still without news of our late companions I remarked that it was very simple; it was plain they were just hiding from us; they thought us dangerous; they wished to avoid entanglements. They had found us too attentive and wished not to raise false hopes. He appeared to accept this explanation and even had the air (so at least I judged from his asking me no questions) of thinking that the matter might be delicate for myself. The poor youth was altogether much mystified, and I smiled at the image in his mind of Mrs. Pallant fleeing from his uncle's importunities.

We decided to leave Homburg, but if we did not pursue her it was not simply that we were ignorant of where she was. I could have found that out with a little trouble, but I was deterred by the reflection that this would be her own reasoning. She was dishonest and her departure was a provocation—I am afraid that it was in that stupid conviction that I made out a little independent itinerary with Archie. I even said to myself that we should learn where they were quite soon enough and that our patience—even my young man's—would be longer than theirs. Therefore I uttered a small private cry of triumph when three weeks later (we happened to be at Interlaken) he told me that he had received a note from Miss Pallant. His manner of telling me was to inquire whether there were any particular reasons why we should longer delay our projected visit to the Italian lakes; was not the fear of the hot weather, which was moreover in summer our native temperature, at an end, as it was already the middle



of September? I answered that we would start on the morrow if he liked, and then, pleased apparently that I was so easy to deal with, he revealed his little secret. He showed me the letter, which was a graceful, natural document—it covered with a few flowing strokes but a single page of notepaper—not at all compromising to the young lady. If however it was almost the apology I had looked for (save that that should have come from the mother), it was not ostensibly in the least an invitation. It mentioned casually (the mention was mainly in the date) that they were on the Lago Maggiore, at Baveno; but it consisted mainly of the expression of a regret that they had to leave us at Homburg without giving notice. Linda did not say under what necessity they had found themselves; she only hoped we had not judged them too harshly and would accept ‘these few hasty words’ as a substitute for the omitted good-bye. She also hoped we were passing our time in an interesting manner and having the same lovely weather that prevailed south of the Alps; and she remained very sincerely, with the kindest remembrances to me.

The note contained no message from her mother and it was open to me to suppose, as I should judge, either that Mrs. Pallant had not known she was writing or that they wished to make us think she had not known. The letter might pass as a common civility of the girl’s to a person with whom she had been on very familiar terms. It was however as something more than this that my nephew took it; at least so I was warranted in inferring from the very distinct nature of his determination to go to Baveno. I saw it was useless to drag him another

way ; he had money in his own pocket and was quite capable of giving me the slip. Yet—such are the sweet incongruities of youth—when I asked him if he had been thinking of Linda Pallant ever since they left us in the lurch he replied, ‘Oh dear no ; why should I?’ This fib was accompanied by an exorbitant blush. Since he must obey the young lady’s call I must also go and see where it would take him, and one splendid morning we started over the Simplon in a post-chaise.

I represented to him successfully that it would be in much better taste for us to alight at Stresa, which as every one knows is a resort of tourists, also on the shore of the major lake, at about a mile’s distance from Baveno. If we stayed at the latter place we should have to inhabit the same hotel as our friends, and this would be indiscreet, considering our peculiar relations with them. Nothing would be easier than to go and come between the two points, especially by the water, which would give Archie a chance for unlimited paddling. His face lighted up at the vision of a pair of oars ; he pretended to take my plea for discretion very seriously and I could see that he immediately began to calculate opportunities for being afloat with Linda. Our post-chaise (I had insisted on easy stages and we were three days on the way) deposited us at Stresa toward the middle of the afternoon, and it was within an amazingly short time that I found myself in a small boat with my nephew, who pulled us over to Baveno with vigorous strokes. I remember the sweetness of the whole impression (I had had it before, but to my companion it was new and he thought it as pretty as the opera) ; the enchanting beauty of the place

and hour, the stillness of the air and water, with the romantic, fantastic Borromean Islands in the midst of them. We disembarked at the steps at the garden-foot of the hotel, and somehow it seemed a perfectly natural part of the lovely situation that I should immediately become conscious Mrs. Pallant and her daughter were sitting there—on the terrace—quietly watching us. They had all the air of expecting us and I think we looked for it in them. I had not even asked Archie if he had answered Linda's note; that was between themselves and in the way of supervision I had done enough in coming with him.

There is no doubt there was something very odd in our meeting with our friends—at least as between Louisa and me. I was too much taken up with that part of it to notice very much what was the manner of the encounter of the young people. I have sufficiently indicated that I could not get it out of my head that Mrs. Pallant was 'up to' something, and I am afraid she saw in my face that this suspicion had been the motive of my journey. I had come there to find her out. The knowledge of my purpose could not help her to make me very welcome, and that is why I say we met in strange conditions. However, on this occasion we observed all forms and the admirable scene gave us plenty to talk about. I made no reference before Linda to the retreat from Homburg. She looked even prettier than she had done on the eve of that manœuvre and gave no sign of an awkward consciousness. She struck me so, afresh, as a charming, clever girl that I was puzzled afresh to know why we should get—or should have got—into a tangle about her. People

had to want to complicate a situation to do it on so simple a pretext as that Linda was admirable. So she was, and why 'should not the consequences be equally so? One of them, on the spot, was that at the end of a very short time Archie proposed to her to take a turn with him in his boat, which awaited us at the foot of the steps. She looked at her mother with a smiling 'May I, mamma?' and Mrs. Pallant answered, 'Certainly, darling, if you are not afraid.' At this—I scarcely knew why—I burst out laughing; it seemed so droll to me somehow that timidity should be imputed to this competent young lady. She gave me a quick, slightly sharp look as she turned away with my nephew; it appeared to challenge me a little—to say, 'Pray what is the matter with *you*?' It was the first expression of the kind I had ever seen in her face. Mrs. Pallant's eyes, on the other hand, were not turned to mine; after we had been left there together she sat silent, not heeding me, looking at the lake and mountains—at the snowy crests which wore the flush of evening. She seemed not even to watch our young companions as they got into their boat and pushed off. For some minutes I respected her reverie; I walked slowly up and down the terrace and lighted a cigar, as she had always permitted me to do at Homburg. I noticed that she had an expression of weariness which I had never seen before; her delicate, agreeable face was pale; I made out that there were new lines of fatigue, almost of age, in it. At last I stopped in front of her and asked her, since she looked so sad, if she had any bad news.

'The only bad news was when I learned—through

your nephew's note to Linda—that you were coming to us.'

'Ah, then he wrote?' I exclaimed.

'Certainly he wrote.'

'You take it all harder than I do,' I remarked, sitting down beside her. And then I added, smiling, 'Have you written to his mother?'

She slowly turned her face to me and rested her eyes on mine. 'Take care, take care, or you'll insult me,' she said, with an air of patience before the inevitable.

'Never, never! Unless you think I do so if I ask you if you knew when Linda wrote.'

She hesitated a moment. 'Yes; she showed me her letter. She wouldn't have done anything else. I let it go because I didn't know what it was best to do. I am afraid to oppose her, to her face.'

'Afraid, my dear friend, with that girl?'

'That girl? Much you know about her! It didn't follow that you would come—I didn't think it need follow.'

'I am like you,' I said—'I am afraid of my nephew. I don't venture to oppose him to his face. The only thing I could do under the circumstances was to come with him.'

'I see; I'm glad you have done it,' said Mrs. Pallant, thoughtfully.

'Oh, I was conscientious about that! But I have no authority; I can't order him nor forbid him—I can use no force. Look at the way he is pulling that boat and see if you can fancy me.'

'You could tell him she's a bad, hard girl, who would poison any good man's life!' my companion suddenly broke out, with a kind of passion.

‘Dear Mrs. Pallant, what do you mean?’ I murmured, staring.

She bent her face into her hands, covering it over with them, and remained so for a minute; then she went on, in a different manner, as if she had not heard my question: ‘I hoped you were too disgusted with us, after the way we left you planted.’

‘It was disconcerting, assuredly, and it might have served if Linda hadn’t written. That patched it up,’ I said, laughing. But my laughter was hollow, for I had been exceedingly impressed with her little explosion of a moment before. ‘Do you really mean she is bad?’ I added.

Mrs. Pallant made no immediate answer to this; she only said that it did not matter after all whether the crisis should come a few weeks sooner or a few weeks later, since it was destined to come at the first opening. Linda had marked my young man—and when Linda had marked a thing!

‘Bless my soul—how very grim! Do you mean she’s in love with him?’ I demanded, incredulous.

‘It’s enough if she makes him think she is—though even that isn’t essential.’

‘If she makes him think so? Dearest lady, what do you mean? I have observed her, I have watched her, and after all what has she done? She has been nice to him, but it would have been much more marked if she hadn’t. She has really shown him nothing but the common friendliness of a bright, good-natured girl. Her note was nothing; he showed it to me.’

‘I don’t think you have heard every word that she has said to him,’ Mrs. Pallant rejoined, with a persistence that struck me as unnatural.



‘No more have you, I take it!’ I exclaimed. She evidently meant more than she said, and this impression chilled me, made me really uncomfortable.

‘No, but I know my own daughter. She’s a very rare young woman.’

‘You have a singular tone about her,’ I responded—‘such a tone as I think I have never heard on a mother’s lips. I have observed it before, but never so accentuated.’

At this Mrs. Pallant got up; she stood there an instant, looking down at me. ‘You make my reparation—my expiation—difficult!’ And leaving me rather startled, she began to move along the terrace.

I overtook her presently and repeated her words. ‘Your reparation—your expiation? What on earth do you mean by that?’

‘You know perfectly what I mean—it is too magnanimous of you to pretend you don’t.’

‘Well, at any rate I don’t see what good it does me or what it makes up to me for that you should abuse your daughter.’

‘Oh, I don’t care; I shall save him!’ she exclaimed, as we went, with a kind of perverse cheerfulness. At the same moment two ladies, apparently English, came toward us (scattered groups had been sitting there and the inmates of the hotel were moving to and fro), and I observed the immediate charming transition (it seemed to me to show such years of social practice), by which, as they greeted us, she exchanged her excited, almost fevered expression for an air of recognition and pleasure. They stopped to speak to her and she



asked with eagerness whether their mother were better. I strolled on and she presently rejoined me; after which she said impatiently, 'Come away from this—come down into the garden.' We descended into the garden, strolled through it and paused on the border of the lake.

## V

THE charm of the evening had deepened, the stillness was like a solemn expression on a beautiful face and the whole air of the place divine. In the fading light my nephew's boat was too far out to be perceived. I looked for it a little and then, as I gave it up, I remarked that from such an excursion as that, on such a lake, at such an hour, a young man and a young woman of ordinary sensibility could only come back doubly pledged to each other. To this observation Mrs. Pallant's answer was, superficially at least, irrelevant ; she said after a pause :

'With you, my dear sir, one has certainly to dot one's "i's." Haven't you discovered, and didn't I tell you at Homburg, that we are miserably poor ?'

'Isn't "miserably" rather too much, when you are living at an expensive hotel ?'

'They take us *en pension*, for ever so little a day. I have been knocking about Europe long enough to learn there are certain ways of doing things. Besides, don't speak of hotels ; we have spent half our life in them and Linda told me only last night that she hoped never to put her foot into one again. She thinks that when she comes to such a place as this it's the least that she should find a villa of her own.'

‘Well, her companion there is perfectly competent to give her one. Don’t think I have the least desire to push them into each other’s arms ; I only ask to wash my hands of them. But I should like to know why you want, as you said just now, to save him. When you speak as if your daughter were a monster I take it that you are not serious.’

She was facing me there in the twilight, and to let me know that she was more serious perhaps than she had ever been in her life she had only to look at me awhile without protestation. ‘It’s Linda’s standard. God knows I myself could get on ! She is ambitious, luxurious, determined to have what she wants, more than any one I have ever seen. Of course it’s open to you to tell me that it’s my fault, that I was so before her and have made her so. But does that make me like it any better ?’

‘Dear Mrs. Pallant, you are most extraordinary,’ I stammered, infinitely surprised and not a little pained.

‘Oh yes, you have made up your mind about me ; you see me in a certain way and you don’t like the trouble of changing. *Votre siège est fait*. But you will have to change—if you have any generosity !’ Her eyes shone in the summer dusk and she looked remarkably handsome.

‘Is this a part of the reparation, of the expiation ?’ I inquired. ‘I don’t see what you ever did to Archie.’

‘It’s enough that he belongs to you. But it isn’t for you that I do it ; it’s for myself,’ she went on.

‘Doubtless you have your own reasons, which I can’t penetrate. But can’t you sacrifice something else ?—must you sacrifice your child ?’

‘She’s my punishment and she’s my stigma!’ cried Louisa Pallant, with veritable exaltation.

‘It seems to me rather that you are hers.’

‘Hers? What does *she* know of such things?—what can she ever feel? She’s cased in steel; she has a heart of marble. It’s true—it’s true. She appals me!’

I laid my hand upon the poor lady’s; I uttered, with the intention of checking and soothing her, the first incoherent words that came into my head and I drew her toward a bench which I perceived a few yards away. She dropped upon it; I placed myself near her and besought her to consider well what she was saying. She owed me nothing and I wished no one injured, no one denounced or exposed for my sake.

‘For your sake? Oh, I am not thinking of you!’ she answered; and indeed the next moment I thought my words rather fatuous. ‘It’s a satisfaction to my own conscience—for I have one, little as you think I have a right to speak of it. I have been punished by my sin itself. I have been hideously worldly, I have thought only of that, and I have taught her to be so—to do the same. That’s the only instruction I have ever given her, and she has learned the lesson so well that now that I see it printed there in all her nature I am horrified at my work. For years we have lived that way; we have thought of nothing else. She has learned it so well that she has gone far beyond me. I say I am horrified, because she is horrible.’

‘My poor extravagant friend,’ I pleaded, ‘isn’t it still more so to hear a mother say such things?’

‘Why so, if they are abominably true? Besides, I don’t care what I say, if I save him.’

‘Do you expect me to repeat to him——?’

‘Not in the least,’ she broke in; ‘I will do it myself.’ At this I uttered some strong inarticulate protest, and she went on with a sort of simplicity: ‘I was very glad at first, but it would have been better if we hadn’t met.’

‘I don’t agree to that, for you interest me immensely.’

‘I don’t care for that—if I can interest him.’

‘You must remember then that your charges are strangely vague, considering how violent they are. Never had a girl a more innocent appearance. You know how I have admired it.’

‘You know nothing about her. *I* do, for she is the work of my hand!’ Mrs. Pallant declared, with a bitter laugh. ‘I have watched her for years and little by little, for the last two or three, it has come over me. There is not a tender spot in her whole composition. To arrive at a brilliant social position, if it were necessary, she would see me drown in this lake without lifting a finger, she would stand there and see it—she would push me in—and never feel a pang. That’s my young lady! To climb up to the top and be splendid and envied there—to do it at any cost or by any meanness and cruelty, is the only thing she has a heart for. She would lie for it, she would steal for it, she would kill for it!’ My companion brought out these words with a tremendous low distinctness and an air of sincerity that was really solemn. I watched her pale face and glowing eyes; she held me in a kind of stupor, but her strange, almost vindictive earnestness imposed itself. I found myself believing her, pitying her more than I pitied the girl. It was as if she had been bottled

up for longer than she could bear, suffering more and more from the ferment of her knowledge. It relieved her to warn and denounce and expose. 'God has let me see it in time, in his mercy,' she continued; 'but his ways are strange, that he has let me see it in my daughter. It is myself that he has let me see, myself as I was for years. But she's worse—she is, I assure you; she's worse than I ever intended or dreamed.' Her hands were clasped tightly together in her lap; her low voice quavered and her breath came short; she looked up at the faint stars with religious perversity.

'Have you ever spoken to her as you speak to me?' I asked. 'Have you ever admonished her, reproached her?'

'Reproached her? How can I? when all she would have to say would be, "You—*you*—you base one—who made me!"'

'Then why do you want to play her a trick?'

'I'm not bound to tell you and you wouldn't understand if I did. I should play that boy a far worse trick if I were to hold my tongue.'

'If he loves her he won't believe a word you say.'

'Very possibly, but I shall have done my duty.'

'And shall you say to him simply what you have said to me?'

'Never mind what I shall say to him. It will be something that will perhaps affect him, if I lose no time.'

'If you are so bent on gaining time,' I said, 'why did you let her go out in the boat with him?'

'Let her? how could I prevent it?'

'But she asked your permission.'

'That's a part of all the comedy!'

We were silent a moment, after which I resumed :  
‘Then she doesn’t know you hate her?’

‘I don’t know what she knows. She has depths and depths, and all of them bad. Besides, I don’t hate her in the least; I pity her simply, for what I have made of her. But I pity still more the man who may find himself married to her.’

‘There’s not much danger of there being any such person, at the rate you go on.’

‘Oh, perfectly; she’ll marry some one. She’ll marry a title as well as a fortune.’

‘It’s a pity my nephew hasn’t a title,’ I murmured, smiling.

She hesitated a moment. ‘I see you think I want that and that I am acting a part. God forgive you! Your suspicion is perfectly natural: how can any one tell, with people like us?’

The way she uttered these last words brought tears to my eyes. I laid my hand on her arm, holding her awhile, and we looked at each other through the dusk. ‘You couldn’t do more if he were my son,’ I said at last.

‘Oh, if he had been your son he would have kept out of it! I like him for himself; he’s simple and honest—he needs affection.’

‘He would have an admirable, a devoted, mother-in-law,’ I went on.

Mrs. Pallant gave a little impatient sigh and replied that she was not joking. We sat there some time longer, while I thought over what she had said to me and she apparently did the same. I confess that even close at her side, with the echo of her passionate, broken voice still in the air, some queer ideas came into my head. Was the comedy on *her*



side and not on the girl's, and was she posturing as a magnanimous woman at poor Linda's expense? Was she determined, in spite of the young lady's preference, to keep her daughter for a grander personage than a young American whose dollars were not numerous enough (numerous as they were) to make up for his want of high relationships, and had she brought forth these cruel imputations to help her to her end? If she was prepared really to denounce the girl to Archie she would have to go very far to overcome the suspicion he would be sure to feel at so unnatural a proceeding. Was she prepared to go far enough? The answer to these doubts was simply the way I had been touched—it came back to me the next moment—when she used the words, 'people like us.' The effect of them was poignant. She made herself humble indeed and I felt in a manner ashamed, on my own side, that I saw her in the dust. She said to me at last that I must wait no longer; I must go away before the young people came back. They were staying very long, too long; all the more reason that she should deal with Archie that evening. I must drive back to Stresa or, if I liked, I could go on foot: it was not far—for a man. She disposed of me freely, she was so full of her purpose; and after we had quitted the garden and returned to the terrace of the hotel she seemed almost to push me to leave her—I felt her fine hands, quivering a little, on my shoulders. I was ready to do what she liked: she affected me painfully and I wanted to get away from her. Before I went I asked her why Linda should regard my young man as such a *parti*; it did not square after all with her account of the girl's fierce ambitions. By that

picture it would seem that a reigning prince was the least she would look at.

‘Oh, she has reflected well ; she has regarded the question in every light,’ said Mrs. Pallant. ‘If she has made up her mind it is because she sees what she can do.’

‘Do you mean that she has talked it over with you?’

‘Lord ! for what do you take us ? We don’t talk over things to-day. We know each other’s point of view and we only have to act. We can take reasons, which are awkward things, for granted.’

‘But in this case she certainly doesn’t know your point of view, poor thing.’

‘No—that’s because I haven’t played fair. Of course she couldn’t expect I would cheat. There ought to be honour among thieves. But it was open to her to do the same.’

‘How do you mean, to do the same?’

‘She might have fallen in love with a poor man ; then I should have been done.’

‘A rich one is better ; he can do more,’ I replied, with conviction.

‘So you would have reason to know if you had led the life that we have ! Never to have had really enough—I mean to do just the few simple things we have wanted ; never to have had the sinews of war, I suppose you would call them—the funds for a campaign ; to have felt every day and every hour the hard, monotonous pinch and found the question of dollars and cents (and so horridly few of them) mixed up with every experience, with every impulse—that *does* make one mercenary, it does make money seem a good beyond all others, and it’s quite natural

it should. That is why Linda is of the opinion that a fortune is always a fortune. She knows all about that of your nephew, how it's invested, how it may be expected to increase, exactly on what sort of footing it would enable her to live. She has decided that it's enough, and enough is as good as a feast. She thinks she could lead him by the nose, and I daresay she could. She will make him live here: she has not the least intention of settling in America. I think she has views upon London, because in England he can hunt and shoot, and that will make him let her alone.'

'It strikes me that he would like that very much,' I interposed; 'that's not at all a bad programme, even from Archie's point of view.'

'It's no use of talking about princes,' Mrs. Pallant pursued, as if she had not heard me. 'Yes, they are most of them more in want of money even than we are. Therefore a title is out of the question, and we recognised that at an early stage. Your nephew is exactly the sort of young man we had constructed in advance—he was made on purpose. Dear Linda was her mother's own daughter when she recognised him on the spot! It's enough of a title to-day to be an American—with the way they have come up. It does as well as anything and it's a great simplification. If you don't believe me go to London and see.'

She had come with me out to the road. I had said I would walk back to Stresa and we stood there in the complete evening. As I took her hand, bidding her good-night, I exclaimed, 'Poor Linda—poor Linda!'

'Oh, she'll live to do better,' said Mrs. Pallant.

‘How can she do better, since you have described this as perfection?’

She hesitated a moment. ‘I mean better for Mr. Pringle.’

I still had her hand—I remained looking at her. ‘How came it that you could throw me over—such a woman as you?’

‘Ah, my friend, if I hadn’t thrown you over I couldn’t do this for you?’ And disengaging herself she turned away quickly and went back to the hotel.

## VI

I DON'T know whether she blushed as she made this avowal, which was a retraction of a former denial and the real truth, as I permitted myself to believe ; but I did, while I took my way to Stresa—it is a walk of half an hour—in the darkness. The new and singular character in which she had appeared to me produced an effect of excitement which would have made it impossible for me to sit still in a carriage. This same agitation kept me up late after I had reached my hotel ; as I knew that I should not sleep it was useless to go to bed. Long, however, as I deferred this ceremony Archie had not turned up when the lights in the hotel began to be put out. I felt even slightly nervous about him and wondered whether he had had an accident on the lake. I reflected that in this case—if he had not brought his companion back to Baveno—Mrs. Pallant would already have sent after me. It was foolish moreover to suppose that anything could have happened to him after putting off from Baveno by water to rejoin me, for the evening was absolutely windless and more than sufficiently clear and the lake as calm as glass. Besides I had unlimited confidence in his power to take care of himself in

circumstances much more difficult. I went to my room at last; his own was at some distance, the people of the hotel not having been able—it was the height of the autumn season—to place us together. Before I went to bed I had occasion to ring for a servant, and then I learned by a chance inquiry that my nephew had returned an hour before and had gone straight to his own apartment. I had not supposed he could come in without my seeing him—I was wandering about the saloons and terraces—and it had not occurred to me to knock at his door. I had half a mind to do so then—I had such a curiosity as to how I should find him; but I checked myself, for evidently he had not wished to see me. This did not diminish my curiosity, and I slept even less than I had expected. His dodging me that way (for if he had not perceived me downstairs he might have looked for me in my room) was a sign that Mrs. Pallant's interview with him had really come off. What had she said to him? What strong measures had she taken? The impression of almost morbid eagerness of purpose that she had given me suggested possibilities that I was afraid to think of. She had spoken of these things as we parted there as something she would do for me; but I had made the mental comment, as I walked away from her, that she had not done it yet. It would not really be done till Archie had backed out. Perhaps it was done by this time; his avoiding me seemed almost a proof. That was what I thought of most of the night. I spent a considerable part of it at my window, looking out at the sleeping mountains. *Had* he backed out?—was he making up his mind to back out?

There was a strange contradiction in it ; there were in fact more contradictions than ever. I believed what Mrs. Pallant had told me about Linda, and yet that other idea made me ashamed of my nephew. I was sorry for the girl ; I regretted her loss of a great chance, if loss it was to be ; and yet I hoped that the manner in which her mother had betrayed her (there was no other word) to her lover had been thoroughgoing. It would need very radical measures on Mrs. Pallant's part to excuse Archie. For him too I was sorry, if she had made an impression on him—the impression she desired. Once or twice I was on the point of going in to condole with him, in my dressing-gown ; I was sure he too had jumped up from his bed and was looking out of his window at the everlasting hills.

I am bound to say that he showed few symptoms when we met in the morning and breakfasted together. Youth is strange ; it has resources that experience seems only to take away from us. One of these is simply (in the given case) to do nothing—to say nothing. As we grow older and cleverer we think that is too simple, too crude ; we dissimulate more elaborately, but with an effect much less baffling. My young man looked not in the least as if he had lain awake or had something on his mind ; and when I asked him what he had done after my premature departure (I explained this by saying I had been tired of waiting for him—I was weary with my journey and wanted to go to bed), he replied : 'Oh, nothing in particular. I hung about the place ; I like it better than this. We had an awfully jolly time on the water. I wasn't in the least tired.' I did not worry him with questions ; it seemed to me



indelicate to try to probe his secret. The only indication he gave was on my saying after breakfast that I should go over again to see our friends and my appearing to take for granted that he would be glad to accompany me. Then he remarked that he would stop at Stresa—he had paid them such a tremendous visit; also he had some letters to write. There was a freshness in his scruples about the length of his visits, and I knew something about his correspondence, which consisted entirely of twenty pages every week from his mother. But he satisfied my curiosity so little that it was really this sentiment that carried me back to Baveno. This time I ordered a conveyance, and as I got into it he stood watching me in the porch of the hotel with his hands in his pockets. Then it was for the first time that I saw in this young man's face the expression of a person slightly dazed, slightly foolish even, to whom something disagreeable has happened. Our eyes met as I observed him, and I was on the point of saying, 'You had really better come with me,' when he turned away. He went into the house as if he wished to escape from my call. I said to myself that Mrs. Pallant had warned him off but that it would not take much to bring him back.

The servant to whom I spoke at Baveno told me that my friends were in a certain summer-house in the garden, to which he led the way. The place had an empty air; most of the inmates of the hotel were dispersed on the lake, on the hills, in picnics, excursions, visits to the Borromean Islands. My guide was so far right as that Linda was in the summer-house, but she was there alone. On finding this to be the case I stopped short, rather awkwardly, for

I had a sudden sense of being an unmasked hypocrite—a conspirator against her security and honour. But there was no awkwardness about Linda Pallant; she looked up with a little cry of pleasure from the book she was reading and held out her hand with the most engaging frankness. I felt as if I had no right to touch her hand and I pretended not to see it. But this gave no chill to her pretty manner; she moved a roll of tapestry off the bench, so that I might sit down, and praised the place as a delightful shady corner. She had never been fresher, fairer, kinder; she made her mother's damning talk about her seem a hideous dream. She told me Mrs. Pallant was coming to join her; she had remained indoors to write a letter. One could not write out there, though it was so nice in other respects: the table was too rickety. They too then had pretexts between them in the way of letters: I judged this to be a token that the situation was tense. It was the only one however that Linda gave: like Archie she was young enough to carry it off. She had been used to seeing us always together and she made no comment on my having come over without him. I waited in vain for her to say something about it; this would only be natural—it was almost unfriendly to omit it. At last I observed that my nephew was very unsociable that morning; I had expected him to join me but he had left me to come alone.

‘I am very glad,’ she answered. ‘You can tell him that if you like.’

‘If I tell him that he will come immediately.’

‘Then don't tell him; I don't want him to come. He stayed too long last night,’ Linda went on, ‘and kept me out on the water till the most dreadful

hours. That isn't done here, you know, and every one was shocked when we came back—or rather when we didn't come back. I begged him to bring me in, but he wouldn't. When we did return—I almost had to take the oars myself—I felt as if every one had been sitting up to time us, to stare at us. It was very embarrassing.'

These words made an impression upon me ; and as I have treated the reader to most of the reflections—some of them perhaps rather morbid—in which I indulged on the subject of this young lady and her mother I may as well complete the record and let him know that I now wondered whether Linda—candid and accomplished maiden—had conceived the fine idea of strengthening her hold of Archie by attempting to prove that he had 'compromised' her. 'Ah, no doubt that was the reason he had a bad conscience last evening!' I exclaimed. 'When he came back to Stresa he sneaked off to his room ; he wouldn't look me in the face.'

'Mamma was so vexed that she took him apart and gave him a scolding,' the girl went on. 'And to punish *me* she sent me straight to bed. She has very old-fashioned ideas—haven't you, mamma?' she added, looking over my head at Mrs. Pallant, who had just come in behind me.

I forget what answer Mrs. Pallant made to Linda's appeal ; she stood there with two letters, sealed and addressed, in her hand. She greeted me gaily and then asked her daughter if she had any postage-stamps. Linda consulted a somewhat shabby pocket-book and confessed that she was destitute ; whereupon her mother gave her the letters, with the request that she would go into

the hotel, buy the proper stamps at the office, carefully affix them and put the letters into the box. She was to pay for the stamps, not have them put on the bill—a preference for which Mrs. Pallant gave her reasons. I had bought some at Stresa that morning and I was on the point of offering them, when, apparently having guessed my intention, the elder lady silenced me with a look. Linda told her she had no money and she fumbled in her pocket for a franc. When she had found it and the girl had taken it Linda kissed her before going off with the letters.

‘Darling mother, you haven’t any too many of them, have you?’ she murmured; and she gave me, sidelong, as she left us, the prettiest half comical, half pitiful smile.

‘She’s amazing—she’s amazing,’ said Mrs. Pallant, as we looked at each other.

‘Does she know what you have done?’

‘She knows I have done something and she is making up her mind what it is—or she will in the course of the next twenty-four hours, if your nephew doesn’t come back. I think I can promise you he won’t.’

‘And won’t she ask you?’

‘Never!’

‘Shall you not tell her? Can you sit down together in this summer-house, this divine day, with such a dreadful thing as that between you?’

‘Don’t you remember what I told you about our relations—that everything was implied between us and nothing expressed? The ideas we have had in common—our perpetual worldliness, our always looking out for chances—are not the sort of thing

that can be uttered gracefully between persons who like to keep up forms, as we both do : so that if we understood each other it was enough. We shall understand each other now, as we have always done, and nothing will be changed, because there has always been something between us that couldn't be talked about.'

'Certainly, she is amazing—she is amazing,' I repeated ; 'but so are you.' And then I asked her what she had said to my boy.

She seemed surprised. 'Hasn't he told you?'

'No, and he never will.'

'I am glad of that,' she said, simply.

'But I am not sure he won't come back. He didn't this morning, but he had already half a mind to.'

'That's your imagination,' said Mrs. Pallant, decisively. 'If you knew what I told him you would be sure.'

'And you won't let me know?'

'Never, my near friend.'

'And did he believe you?'

'Time will show ; but I think so.'

'And how did you make it plausible to him that you should take so unnatural a course?'

For a moment she said nothing, only looking at me. Then at last—'I told him the truth.'

'The truth?' I repeated.

'Take him away—take him away!' she broke out. 'That's why I got rid of Linda, to tell you that you mustn't stay—you must leave Stresa to-morrow. This time it's you that must do it ; I can't fly from you again—it costs too much!' And she smiled strangely.

'Don't be afraid ; don't be afraid. We will leave

to-morrow ; I want to go myself.' I took her hand in farewell, and while I held it I said, 'The way you put it, about Linda, was very bad?'

'It was horrible.'

I turned away—I felt indeed that I wanted to leave the neighbourhood. She kept me from going to the hotel, as I might meet Linda coming back, which I was far from wishing to do, and showed me another way into the road. Then she turned round to meet her daughter and spend the rest of the morning in the summer-house with her, looking at the bright blue lake and the snowy crests of the Alps. When I reached Stresa again I found that Archie had gone off to Milan (to see the cathedral, the servant said), leaving a message for me to the effect that, as he should not be back for a day or two (though there were numerous trains), he had taken a small portmanteau with him. The next day I got a telegram from him notifying me that he had determined to go on to Venice and requesting me to forward the rest of his luggage. 'Please don't come after me,' this missive added ; 'I want to be alone ; I shall do no harm.' That sounded pathetic to me, in the light of what I knew, and I was glad to leave the poor boy to his own devices. He proceeded to Venice and I recrossed the Alps. For several weeks after this I expected to discover that he had rejoined Mrs. Pallant ; but when we met in Paris, in November, I saw that he had nothing to hide from me, except indeed the secret of what that lady had told him. This he concealed from me then and has concealed ever since. He returned to America before Christmas and then I felt that the crisis had passed. I have never seen my old friend



since. About a year after the time to which my story refers, Linda married, in London, a young Englishman, the possessor of a large fortune, a fortune acquired by his father in some useful industry. Mrs. Gimingham's photographs (such is her present name) may be obtained from the principal stationers. I am convinced her mother was sincere. My nephew has not changed his state yet, and now even my sister is beginning, for the first time, to desire it. I related to her as soon as I saw her the substance of the story I have written here, and (such is the inconsequence of women) nothing can exceed her reprobation of Louisa Pallant.





# THE MODERN WARNING



## THE MODERN WARNING

### I

WHEN he reached the hotel Macarthy Grice was apprised, to his great disappointment, of the fact that his mother and sister were absent for the day, and he reproached himself with not having been more definite in announcing his arrival to them in advance. It was a little his nature to expect people to know things about himself that he had not told them and to be vexed when he found they were ignorant of them. I will not go so far as to say that he was inordinately conceited, but he had a general sense that he himself knew most things without having them pumped into him. He had been uncertain about his arrival and, since he disembarked at Liverpool, had communicated his movements to the two ladies who after spending the winter in Rome were awaiting him at Cadenabbia only by notes as brief as telegrams and on several occasions by telegrams simply. It struck his mother that he spent a great deal of money on these latter missives—which were mainly negative, mainly to say that he could not yet say when he *should* be able to start for the Continent. He had had business in London and

had apparently been a good deal vexed by the discovery that, most of the people it was necessary for him to see being out of town, the middle of August was a bad time for transacting it. Mrs. Grice gathered that he had had annoyances and disappointments, but she hoped that by the time he should join them his serenity would have been restored. She had not seen him for a year and her heart hungered for her boy. Family feeling was strong among these three though Macarthy's manner of showing it was sometimes peculiar, and her affection for her son was jealous and passionate; but she and Agatha made no secret between themselves of the fact that the privilege of being his mother and his sister was mainly sensible when things were going well with him. They were a little afraid they were not going well just now and they asked each other why he could not leave his affairs alone for a few weeks anyway and treat his journey to Europe as a complete holiday—a course which would do him infinitely more good. He took life too hard and was overworked and overstrained. It was only to each other however that the anxious and affectionate women made these reflections, for they knew it was of no use to say such things to Macarthy. It was not that he answered them angrily; on the contrary he never noticed them at all. The answer was in the very essence of his nature: he was indomitably ambitious.

They had gone on the steamboat to the other end of the lake and could not possibly be back for several hours. There was a *festa* going on at one of the villages—in the hills, a little way from the lake—and several ladies and gentlemen had gone

from the hotel to be present at it. They would find carriages at the landing and they would drive to the village, after which, the same vehicles would bring them back to the boat. This information was given to Macarthy Grice by the secretary of the hotel, a young man with a very low shirt collar, whose nationality puzzled and even defied him by its indefiniteness (he liked to know whom he was talking to even when he could not have the satisfaction of feeling that it was an American), and who suggested to him that he might follow and overtake his friends in the next steamer. As however there appeared to be some danger that in this case he should cross them on their way back he determined simply to lounge about the lake-side and the grounds of the hotel. The place was lovely, the view magnificent, and there was a coming and going of little boats, of travellers of every nationality, of itinerant vendors of small superfluities. Macarthy observed these things as patiently as his native restlessness allowed—and indeed that quality was reinforced to-day by an inexplicable tendency to fidget. He changed his place twenty times; he lighted a cigar and threw it away; he ordered some luncheon and when it came had no appetite for it. He felt nervous and he wondered what he was nervous about; whether he were afraid that during their excursion an accident had befallen his mother or Agatha. He was not usually a prey to small timidities, and indeed it cost him a certain effort to admit that a little Italian lake could be deep enough to drown a pair of independent Americans or that Italian horses could have the high spirit to run away with them. He talked with no one, for the Americans seemed to him all taken

up with each other and the English all taken up with themselves. He had a few elementary principles for use in travelling (he had travelled little, but he had an abundant supply of theory on the subject), and one of them was that with Englishmen an American should never open the conversation. It was his belief that in doing so an American was exposed to be snubbed, or even insulted, and this belief was unshaken by the fact that Englishmen very often spoke to him, Macarthy, first.

The afternoon passed, little by little, and at last, as he stood there with his hands in his pockets and his hat pulled over his nose to keep the western sun out of his eyes, he saw the boat that he was waiting for round a distant point. At this stage the little annoyance he had felt at the trick his relations had unwittingly played him passed completely away and there was nothing in his mind but the eagerness of affection, the joy of reunion—of the prospective embrace. This feeling was in his face, in the fixed smile with which he watched the boat grow larger and larger. If we watch the young man himself as he does so we shall perceive him to be a tallish, lean personage, with an excessive slope of the shoulders, a very thin neck, a short light beard and a bright, sharp, expressive eye. He almost always wore his hat too much behind or too much in front; in the former case it showed a very fine high forehead. He looked like a man of intellect whose body was not much to him and its senses and appetites not importunate. His feet were small and he always wore a double-breasted frockcoat, which he never buttoned. His mother and sister thought him very handsome. He had this appearance especially of



course when, making them out on the deck of the steamer, he began to wave his hat and his hand to them. They responded in the most demonstrative manner and when they got near enough his mother called out to him over the water that she could not forgive herself for having lost so much of his visit. This was a bold proceeding for Mrs. Grice, who usually held back. Only she had been uncertain—she had not expected him that day in particular. ‘It’s my fault!—it’s my fault!’ exclaimed a gentleman beside her, whom our young man had not yet noticed, raising his hat slightly as he spoke. Agatha, on the other side, said nothing—she only smiled at her brother. He had not seen her for so many months that he had almost forgotten how pretty she was. She looked lovely, under the shadow of her hat and of the awning of the steamer, as she stood there with happiness in her face and a big bunch of familiar flowers in her hand. Macarthy was proud of many things, but on this occasion he was proudest of having such a charming sister. Before they all disembarked he had time to observe the gentleman who had spoken to him—an extraordinarily fair, clean-looking man, with a white waistcoat, a white hat, a glass in one eye and a flower in his button-hole. Macarthy wondered who he was, but only vaguely, as it explained him sufficiently to suppose that he was a gentleman staying at the hotel who had made acquaintance with his mother and sister and taken part in the excursion. The only thing Grice had against him was that he had the air of an American who tried to look like an Englishman—a definite and conspicuous class to the young man’s sense and one in regard to which he entertained a

peculiar abhorrence. He was sorry his relatives should associate themselves with persons of that stamp ; he would almost have preferred that they should become acquainted with the genuine English. He happened to perceive that the individual in question looked a good deal at him ; but he disappeared instantly and discreetly when the boat drew up at the landing and the three Grices—I had almost written the three Graces—pressed each other in their arms.

Half an hour later Macarthy sat between the two ladies at the table d'hôte, where he had a hundred questions to answer and to ask. He was still more struck with Agatha's improvement ; she was older, handsomer, brighter : she had turned completely into a young lady and into a very accomplished one. It seemed to him that there had been a change for the better in his mother as well, the only change of that sort of which the good lady was susceptible, an amelioration of health, a fresher colour and a less frequent cough. Mrs. Grice was a gentle, sallow, serious little woman, the main principle of whose being was the habit of insisting that nothing that concerned herself was of the least consequence. She thought it indelicate to be ill and obtrusive even to be better, and discouraged all conversation of which she was in any degree the subject. Fortunately she had not been able to prevent her children from discussing her condition sufficiently to agree—it took but few words, for they agreed easily, that is Agatha always agreed with her brother—that she must have a change of climate and spend a winter or two in the south of Europe. Mrs. Grice kept her son's birthday all the year and knew an extraordinary

number of stitches in knitting. Her friends constantly received from her, by post, offerings of little mats for the table, done up in an envelope, usually without any writing. She could make little mats in forty or fifty different ways. Toward the end of the dinner Macarthy, who up to this moment had been wholly occupied with his companions, began to look around him and to ask questions about the people opposite. Then he leaned forward a little and turned his eye up and down the row of their fellow-tourists on the same side. It was in this way that he perceived the gentleman who had said from the steamer that it was *his* fault that Mrs. Grice and her daughter had gone away for so many hours and who now was seated at some distance below the younger lady. At the moment Macarthy leaned forward this personage happened to be looking toward him, so that he caught his eye. The stranger smiled at him and nodded, as if an acquaintance might be considered to have been established between them, rather to Macarthy's surprise. He drew back and asked his sister who he was—the fellow who had been with them on the boat.

‘He’s an Englishman—Sir Rufus Chasemore,’ said the girl. Then she added, ‘Such a nice man.’

‘Oh, I thought he was an American making a fool of himself!’ Macarthy rejoined.

‘There’s nothing of the fool about him,’ Agatha declared, laughing; and in a moment she added that Sir Rufus’s usual place was beside hers, on her left hand. On this occasion he had moved away.

‘What do you mean by this occasion?’ her brother inquired.

‘Oh, because you are here.’

‘And is he afraid of me?’

‘Yes, I think he is.’

‘He doesn’t behave so, anyway.’

‘Oh, he has very good manners,’ said the girl.

‘Well, I suppose he’s bound to do that. Isn’t he a kind of nobleman?’ Macarthy asked.

‘Well no, not exactly a nobleman.’

‘Well, some kind of a panjandarum. Hasn’t he got one of their titles?’

‘Yes, but not a very high one,’ Agatha explained.

‘He’s only a K.C.B. And also an M.P.’

‘A K.C.B. and an M.P.? What the deuce is all that?’ And when Agatha had elucidated these mystic signs, as to which the young man’s ignorance was partly simulated, he remarked that the Post-office ought to charge her friend double for his letters—for requiring that amount of stuff in his address. He also said that he owed him one for leading them astray at a time when they were bound to be on hand to receive one who was so dear to them. To this Agatha replied :

‘Ah, you see, Englishmen are like that. They expect women to be so much honoured by their wanting them to do anything. And it must always be what *they* like, of course.’

‘What the men like? Well, that’s all right, only they mustn’t be Englishmen,’ said Macarthy Grice.

‘Oh, if one is going to be a slave I don’t know that the nationality of one’s master matters!’ his sister exclaimed. After which his mother began to ask him if he had seen anything during the previous months of their Philadelphia cousins—some cousins who wrote their name Gryce and for whom Macarthy had but a small affection.

After dinner the three sat out on the terrace of the hotel, in the delicious warmth of the September night. There were boats on the water, decked with coloured lanterns; music and song proceeded from several of them and every influence was harmonious. Nevertheless by the time Macarthy had finished a cigar it was judged best that the old lady should withdraw herself from the evening air. She went into the salon of the hotel, and her children accompanied her, against her protest, so that she might not be alone. Macarthy liked better to sit with his mother in a drawing-room which the lamps made hot than without her under the stars. At the end of a quarter of an hour he became aware that his sister had disappeared, and as some time elapsed without her returning he asked his mother what had become of her.

‘I guess she has gone to walk with Sir Rufus,’ said the old lady, candidly.

‘Why, you seem to do everything Sir Rufus wants, down here!’ her son exclaimed. ‘How did he get such a grip on you?’

‘Well, he has been most kind, Macarthy,’ Mrs. Grice returned, not appearing to deny that the Englishman’s influence was considerable.

‘I have heard it stated that it’s not the custom, down here, for young girls to walk round—at night—with foreign lords.’

‘Oh, he’s not foreign and he’s most reliable,’ said the old lady, very earnestly. It was not in her nature to treat such a question, or indeed any question, as unimportant.

‘Well, that’s all right,’ her son remarked, in a tone which implied that he was in good-humour and

wished not to have his equanimity ruffled. Such accidents with Macarthy Grice were not light things. All the same at the end of five minutes more, as Agatha did not reappear, he expressed the hope that nothing of any kind had sprung up between her and the K.C.B.

‘Oh, I guess they are just conversing by the lake. I’ll go and find them if you like,’ said Mrs. Grice.

‘Well, haven’t they been conversing by the lake—and on the lake—all day?’ asked the young man, without taking up her proposal.

‘Yes, of course we had a great deal of bright talk while we were out. It was quite enough for me to listen to it. But he is most kind—and he knows everything, Macarthy.’

‘Well, that’s all right!’ exclaimed the young man again. But a few moments later he returned to the charge and asked his mother if the Englishman were paying any serious attention—she knew what he meant—to Agatha. ‘Italian lakes and summer evenings and glittering titles and all that sort of thing—of course you know what they may lead to.’

Mrs. Grice looked anxious and veracious, as she always did, and appeared to consider a little. ‘Well, Macarthy, the truth is just this. Your sister is so attractive and so admired that it seems as if wherever she went there was a great interest taken in her. Sir Rufus certainly does like to converse with her, but so have many others—and so would any one in their place. And Agatha is full of conscience. For me that’s her highest attraction.’

‘I’m very much pleased with her—she’s a lovely creature,’ Macarthy remarked.

‘Well, there’s no one whose appreciation could



gratify her more than yours. She has praised you up to Sir Rufus,' added the old lady, simply.

'Dear mother, what has *he* got to do with it?' her son demanded, staring. 'I don't care what Sir Rufus thinks of me.'

Fortunately the good lady was left only for a moment confronted with this inquiry, for Agatha now re-entered the room, passing in from the terrace by one of the long windows and accompanied precisely by the gentleman whom her relatives had been discussing. She came toward them smiling and perhaps even blushing a little, but with an air of considerable resolution, and she said to Macarthy, 'Brother, I want to make you acquainted with a good friend of ours, Sir Rufus Chasemore.'

'Oh, I asked Miss Grice to be so good.' The Englishman laughed, looking easy and genial.

Macarthy got up and extended his hand, with a 'Very happy to know you, sir,' and the two men stood a moment looking at each other while Agatha, beside them, bent her regard upon both. I shall not attempt to translate the reflections which rose in the young lady's mind as she did so, for they were complicated and subtle and it is quite difficult enough to reproduce our own more casual impression of the contrast between her companions. This contrast was extreme and complete, and it was not weakened by the fact that both the men had the signs of character and ability. The American was thin, dry, fine, with something in his face which seemed to say that there was more in him of the spirit than of the letter. He looked unfinished and yet somehow he looked mature, though he was not advanced in life. The Englishman had more detail



about him, something stippled and retouched, an air of having been more artfully fashioned, in conformity with traditions and models. He wore old clothes which looked new, while his transatlantic brother wore new clothes which looked old. He thought he had never heard the American tone so marked as on the lips of Mr. Macarthy Grice, who on his side found in the accent of his sister's friend a strange, exaggerated, even affected variation of the tongue in which he supposed himself to have been brought up. In general he was much irritated by the tricks which the English played with the English language, deprecating especially their use of familiar slang.

'Miss Grice tells me that you have just crossed the ditch, but I'm afraid you are not going to stay with us long,' Sir Rufus remarked, with much pleasantness.

'Well, no, I shall return as soon as I have transacted my business,' Macarthy replied. 'That's all I came for.'

'You don't do us justice; you ought to follow the example of your mother and sister and take a look round,' Sir Rufus went on, with another laugh. He was evidently of a mirthful nature.

'Oh, I have been here before; I've seen the principal curiosities.'

'He has seen everything thoroughly,' Mrs. Grice murmured over her crotchet.

'Ah, I daresay you have seen much more than we poor natives. And your own country is so interesting. I have an immense desire to see that.'

'Well, it certainly repays observation,' said Macarthy Grice.

'You wouldn't like it at all; you would find

it awful,' his sister remarked, sportively, to Sir Rufus.

'Gracious, daughter!' the old lady exclaimed, trying to catch Agatha's eye.

'That's what she's always telling me, as if she were trying to keep me from going. I don't know what she has been doing over there that she wants to prevent me from finding out.' Sir Rufus's eyes, while he made this observation, rested on the young lady in the most respectful yet at the same time the most complacent manner.

She smiled back at him and said with a laugh still clearer than his own, 'I know the kind of people who will like America and the kind of people who won't.'

'Do you know the kind who will like *you* and the kind who won't?' Sir Rufus Chasemore inquired.

'I don't know that in some cases it particularly matters what people like,' Macarthy interposed, with a certain severity.

'Well, I must say I like people to like my country,' said Agatha.

'You certainly take the best way to make them, Miss Grice!' Sir Rufus exclaimed.

'Do you mean by dissuading them from visiting it, sir?' Macarthy asked.

'Oh dear no; by being so charming a representative of it. But I shall most positively go on the first opportunity.'

'I hope it won't be while we are on this side,' said Mrs. Grice, very civilly.

'You will need us over there to explain everything,' her daughter added.

The Englishman looked at her a moment with

his glass in his eye. 'I shall certainly pretend to be very stupid.' Then he went on, addressing himself to Macarthy: 'I have an idea that you have some rocks ahead, but that doesn't diminish—in fact it increases—my curiosity to see the country.'

'Oh, I suspect we'll scratch along all right,' Macarthy replied, with rather a grim smile, in a tone which conveyed that the success of American institutions might not altogether depend on Sir Rufus's judgment of them. He was on the point of expressing his belief, further, that there were European countries which would be glad enough to exchange their 'rocks' for those of the United States; but he kept back this reflection, as it might appear too pointed and he wished not to be rude to a man who seemed on such sociable terms with his mother and sister. In the course of a quarter of an hour the ladies took their departure for the upper regions and Macarthy Grice went off with them. The Englishman looked for him again however, as something had been said about their smoking a cigar together before they went to bed; but he never turned up, so that Sir Rufus puffed his own weed in solitude, strolling up and down the terrace without mingling with the groups that remained and looking much at the starlit lake and mountains.

## II

THE next morning after breakfast Mrs. Grice had a conversation with her son in her own room. Agatha had not yet appeared, and she explained that the girl was sleeping late, having been much fatigued by her excursion the day before as well as by the excitement of her brother's arrival. Macarthy thought it a little singular that she should bear her fatigue so much less well than her mother, but he understood everything in a moment, as soon as the old lady drew him toward her with her little conscious, cautious face, taking his hand in hers. She had had a long and important talk with Agatha the previous evening, after they went upstairs, and she had extracted from the girl some information which she had within a day or two begun very much to desire.

‘It’s about Sir Rufus Chasemore. I couldn’t but think you would wonder—just as I was wondering myself,’ said Mrs. Grice. ‘I felt as if I couldn’t be satisfied till I had asked. I don’t know how you will feel about it. I am afraid it will upset you a little ; but anything that you may think—well, yes, it *is* the case.’

‘Do you mean she is engaged to be married to

your Englishman?' Macarthy demanded, with a face that suddenly flushed.

'No, she's not engaged. I presume she wouldn't take that step without finding out how you'd feel. In fact that's what she said last night.'

'I feel like thunder, I feel like hell!' Macarthy exclaimed; 'and I hope you'll tell her so.'

Mrs. Grice looked frightened and pained. 'Well, my son, I'm glad you've come, if there is going to be any trouble.'

'Trouble—what trouble should there be? He can't marry her if she won't have him.'

'Well, she didn't say she wouldn't have him; she said the question hadn't come up. But she thinks it would come up if she were to give him any sort of opening. That's what I thought and that's what I wanted to make sure of.'

Macarthy looked at his mother for some moments in extreme seriousness; then he took out his watch and looked at that. 'What time is the first boat?' he asked.

'I don't know—there are a good many.'

'Well, we'll take the first—we'll quit this.' And the young man put back his watch and got up with decision.

His mother sat looking at him rather ruefully. 'Would you feel so badly if she were to do it?'

'She may do it without my consent; she shall never do it with,' said Macarthy Grice.

'Well, I could see last evening, by the way you acted—' his mother murmured, as if she thought it her duty to try and enter into his opposition.

'How did I act, ma'am?'

‘Well, you acted as if you didn’t think much of the English.’

‘Well, I don’t,’ said the young man.

‘Agatha noticed it and she thought Sir Rufus noticed it too.’

‘They have such thick hides in general that they don’t notice anything. But if he is more sensitive than the others perhaps it will keep him away.’

‘Would you like to wound him, Macarthy?’ his mother inquired, with an accent of timid reproach.

‘Wound him? I should like to kill him! Please to let Agatha know that we’ll move on,’ the young man added.

Mrs. Grice got up as if she were about to comply with this injunction, but she stopped in the middle of the room and asked of her son, with a quaint effort at conscientious impartiality which would have made him smile if he had been capable of smiling in such a connection, ‘Don’t you think that in some respects the English are a fine nation?’

‘Well, yes; I like them for pale ale and newspaper and umbrellas; and I got a firstrate trunk there the other day. But I want my sister to marry one of her own people.’

‘Yes, I presume it would be better,’ Mrs. Grice remarked. ‘But Sir Rufus has occupied very high positions in his own country.’

‘I know the kind of positions he has occupied; I can tell what they were by looking at him. The more he has done of that the more intensely he represents what I don’t like.’

‘Of course he would stand up for England,’ Mrs. Grice felt herself compelled to admit.

‘Then why the mischief doesn’t he do so in-

stead of running round after Americans?' Macarthy demanded.

'He doesn't run round after us; but we knew his sister, Lady Bolitho, in Rome. She is a most sweet woman and we saw a great deal of her; she took a great fancy to Agatha. I surmise that she mentioned us to him pretty often when she went back to England, and when he came abroad for his autumn holiday, as he calls it—he met us first in the Engadine, three or four weeks ago, and came down here with us—it seemed as if we already knew him and he knew us. He is very talented and he is quite well off.'

'Mother,' said Macarthy Grice, going close to the old lady and speaking very gravely, 'why do you know so much about him? Why have you gone into it so?'

'I haven't gone into it; I only know what he has told us.'

'But why have you given him the right to tell you? How does it concern you whether he is well off?'

The poor woman began to look flurried and scared. 'My son, I have given him no right; I don't know what you mean. Besides, it wasn't he who told us he is well off; it was his sister.'

'It would have been better if you hadn't known his sister,' said the young man, gloomily.

'Gracious, Macarthy, we must know some one!' Mrs. Grice rejoined, with a flicker of spirit.

'I don't see the necessity of your knowing the English.'

'Why Macarthy, can't we even *know* them?' pleaded his mother.



‘You see the sort of thing it gets you into.’

‘It hasn’t got us into anything. Nothing has been done.’

‘So much the better, mother darling,’ said the young man. ‘In that case we will go on to Venice. Where is he going?’

‘I don’t know, but I suppose he won’t come on to Venice if we don’t ask him.’

‘I don’t believe any delicacy would prevent him,’ Macarthy rejoined. ‘But he loathes me; that’s an advantage.’

‘He *loathes* you—when he wanted so to know you?’

‘Oh yes, I understand. Well, now he knows me! He knows he hates everything I like and I hate everything he likes.’

‘He doesn’t imagine you hate your sister, I suppose!’ said the old lady, with a little vague laugh.

‘Mother,’ said Macarthy, still in front of her with his hands in his pockets, ‘I verily believe I should hate her if she were to marry him.’

‘Oh, gracious, my son, don’t, don’t!’ cried Mrs. Grice, throwing herself into his arms with a shudder of horror and burying her face on his shoulder.

Her son held her close and as he bent over her he went on: ‘Dearest mother, don’t you see that we must remain together, that at any rate we mustn’t be separated by different ideas, different associations and institutions? I don’t believe any family has ever had more of the feeling that holds people closely together than we have had: therefore for heaven’s sake let us keep it, let us find our happiness in it as we always have done. Of course Agatha will marry some day; but why need she marry in

such a way as to make a gulf? You and she are all I have, and—I may be selfish—I should like very much to keep you.'

'Of course I will let her know the way you feel,' said the old lady, a moment later, rearranging her cap and her shawl and putting away her pocket-handkerchief.

'It's a matter she certainly ought to understand. She would wish to, unless she is very much changed,' Macarthy added, as if he saw all this with high lucidity.

'Oh, she isn't changed—she'll never change!' his mother exclaimed, with rebounding optimism. She thought it wicked not to take cheerful views.

'She wouldn't if she were to marry an Englishman,' he declared, as Mrs. Grice left him to go to her daughter.

She told him an hour later that Agatha would be quite ready to start for Venice on the morrow and that she said he need have no fear that Sir Rufus Chasemore would follow them. He was naturally anxious to know from her what words she had had with Agatha, but the only very definite information he extracted was to the effect that the girl had declared with infinite feeling that she would never marry an enemy of her country. When he saw her later in the day he thought she had been crying; but there was nothing in her manner to show that she resented any pressure her mother might have represented to her that he had put upon her or that she was making a reluctant sacrifice. Agatha Grice was very fond of her brother, whom she knew to be upright, distinguished and exceedingly mindful of the protection and support that he owed her mother and

herself. He was perverse and obstinate, but she was aware that in essentials he was supremely tender, and he had always been very much the most eminent figure in her horizon.

No allusion was made between them to Sir Rufus Chasemore, though the silence on either side was rather a conscious one, and they talked of the prospective pleasures of Venice and of the arrangements Macarthy would be able to make in regard to his mother's spending another winter in Rome. He was to accompany them to Venice and spend a fortnight with them there, after which he was to return to London to terminate his business and then take his way back to New York. There was a plan of his coming to see them again later in the winter, in Rome, if he should succeed in getting six weeks off. As a man of energy and decision, though indeed of a somewhat irritable stomach, he made light of the Atlantic voyage: it was a rest and a relief, alternating with his close attention to business. That the disunion produced by the state of Mrs. Grice's health was a source of constant regret and even of much depression to him was well known to his mother and sister, who would not have broken up his home by coming to live in Europe if he had not insisted upon it. Macarthy was in the highest degree conscientious; he was capable of suffering the extremity of discomfort in a cause which he held to be right. But his mother and sister *were* his home, all the same, and in their absence he was perceptibly desolate. Fortunately it had been hoped that a couple of southern winters would quite set Mrs. Grice up again and that then everything in America would be as it had been before. Agatha's

affection for her brother was very nearly as great as his affection for herself; but it took the form of wishing that his loneliness might be the cause of his marrying some thoroughly nice girl, inasmuch as after all her mother and she might not always be there. Fraternal tenderness in Macarthy's bosom followed a different logic. He was so fond of his sister that he had a secret hope that she would never marry at all. He had spoken otherwise to his mother, because that was the only way not to seem offensively selfish; but the essence of his thought was that on the day Agatha should marry she would throw him over. On the day she should marry an Englishman she would not throw him over—she would betray him. That is she would betray her country, and it came to the same thing. Macarthy's patriotism was of so intense a hue that to his own sense the national life and his own life flowed in an indistinguishable current.

The particular Englishman he had his eye upon now was not, as a general thing, visible before luncheon. He had told Agatha, who mentioned it to her brother, that in the morning he was immersed in work—in letter-writing. Macarthy wondered what his work might be, but did not condescend to inquire. He was enlightened however by happening by an odd chance to observe an allusion to Sir Rufus in a copy of the *London Times* which he took up in the reading-room of the hotel. This occurred in a letter to the editor of the newspaper, the writer of which accused Agatha's friend of having withheld from the public some information to which the public was entitled. The information had respect to 'the situation in South Africa,' and Sir Rufus was plainly an

agent of the British government, the head of some kind of department or sub-department. This did not make Macarthy like him any better. He was displeased with the idea of England's possessing colonies at all and considered that she had acquired them by force and fraud and held them by a frail and unnatural tenure. It appeared to him that any man who occupied a place in this unrighteous system must have false, detestable views.

Sir Rufus Chasemore turned up on the terrace in the afternoon and bore himself with the serenity of a man unconscious of the damaging inferences that had been formed about him. Macarthy neither avoided him nor sought him out—he even relented a little toward him mentally when he thought of the loss he was about to inflict on him ; but when the Englishman approached him and appeared to wish to renew their conversation of the evening before it struck him that he was wanting in delicacy. There was nothing strange in that however, for delicacy and tact were not the strong point of one's transatlantic cousins, with whom one had always to dot one's i's. It seemed to Macarthy that Sir Rufus Chasemore ought to have guessed that he cared little to keep up an acquaintance with him, though indeed the young American would have been at a loss to say how he was to guess it, inasmuch as he would have resented the imputation that he himself had been rude enough to make such a fact patent. The American ladies were in their apartments, occupied in some manner connected with their intended retreat, and there was nothing for Macarthy but to stroll up and down for nearly half an hour with the personage who was so provokingly the cause of it. It had come

over him now that he should have liked extremely to spend several days on the lake of Como. The place struck him as much more delicious than it had done while he chafed the day before at the absence of his relations. He was angry with the Englishman for forcing him to leave it and still more angry with him for showing so little responsibility or even perception in regard to the matter. It occurred to him while he was in this humour that it might be a good plan to make himself so disagreeable that Sir Rufus would take to his heels and never reappear, fleeing before the portent of such an insufferable brother-in-law. But this plan demanded powers of execution which Macarthy did not flatter himself that he possessed: he felt that it was impossible to him to divest himself of his character of a polished American gentleman.

If he found himself dissenting from most of the judgments and opinions which Sir Rufus Chasemore happened to express in the course of their conversation there was nothing perverse in that: it was a simple fact apparently that the Englishman had nothing in common with him and was predestined to enunciate propositions to which it was impossible for him to assent. Moreover how could he assent to propositions enunciated in that short, offhand, clipping tone, with the words running into each other and the voice rushing up and down the scale? Macarthy, who spoke very slowly, with great distinctness and in general with great correctness, was annoyed not only by his companion's intonation but by the odd and, as it seemed to him, licentious application that he made of certain words. He struck him as wanting in reverence for the language,



which Macarthy had an idea, not altogether unjust, that he himself deeply cherished. He would have admitted that these things were small and not great, but in the usual relations of life the small things count more than the great, and they sufficed at any rate to remind him of the essential antipathy and incompatibility which he had always believed to exist between an Englishman and an American. They were, in the very nature of things, disagreeable to each other—both mentally and physically irreconcilable. In cases where this want of correspondence had been bridged over it was because the American had made weak concessions, had been shamefully accommodating. That was a kind of thing the Englishman, to do him justice, never did; he had at least the courage of his prejudices. It was not unknown to Macarthy that the repugnance in question appeared to be confined to the American male, as was shown by a thousand international marriages, which had transplanted as many of his countrywomen to unnatural British homes. That variation had to be allowed for, and the young man felt that he was allowing for it when he reflected that probably his own sister liked the way Sir Rufus Chasemore spoke. In fact he was intimately convinced she liked it, which was a reason the more for their quitting Cadenabbia the next morning.

Sir Rufus took the opposite point of view quite as much as himself, only he took it gaily and familiarly and laughed about it, as if he were amused at the preferences his companion betrayed and especially amused that he should hold them so gravely, so almost gloomily. This sociable jocosity, as if they had known each other three months was



what appeared to Macarthy so indelicate. They talked no politics and Sir Rufus said nothing more about America ; but it stuck out of the Englishman at every pore that he was a resolute and consistent conservative, a prosperous, accomplished, professional, official Tory. It gave Macarthy a kind of palpitation to think that his sister had been in danger of associating herself with such arrogant doctrines. Not that a woman's political creed mattered ; but that of her husband did. He had an impression that he himself was a passionate democrat, an unshrinking radical. It was a proof of how far Sir Rufus's manner was from being satisfactory to his companion that the latter was unable to guess whether he already knew of the sudden determination of his American friends to leave Cadenabbia or whether their intention was first revealed to him in Macarthy's casual mention of it, which apparently put him out not at all, eliciting nothing more than a frank, cheerful expression of regret. Macarthy somehow mistrusted a man who could conceal his emotions like that. How could he have known they were going unless Agatha had told him, and how could Agatha have told him, since she could not as yet have seen him ? It did not even occur to the young man to suspect that she might have conveyed the unwelcome news to him by a letter. And if he had not known it why was he not more startled and discomfited when Macarthy dealt the blow ? The young American made up his mind at last that the reason why Sir Rufus was not startled was that he had thought in advance it would be no more than natural that the newly-arrived brother should wish to spoil his game. But in that case why was he not angry with him for such a dis-

position? Why did he come after him and insist on talking with him? There seemed to Macarthy something impudent in this incongruity—as if to the mind of an English statesman the animosity of a Yankee lawyer were really of too little account.

### III

IT may be intimated to the reader that Agatha Grice had written no note to her English friend, and she held no communication with him of any sort, till after she had left the table d'hôte with her mother and brother in the evening. Sir Rufus had seated himself at dinner in the same place as the night before ; he was already occupying it and he simply bowed to her with a smile, from a distance, when she came into the room. As she passed out to the terrace later with her companions he overtook her and said to her in a lower tone of voice than usual that he had been exceedingly sorry to hear that she was leaving Cadenabbia so soon. Was it really true ? could not they put it off a little ? should not they find the weather too hot in Venice and the mosquitoes too numerous ? Agatha saw that Sir Rufus asked these questions with the intention of drawing her away, engaging her in a walk, in some talk to which they should have no listeners ; and she resisted him at first a little, keeping near the others because she had made up her mind that morning in deep and solitary meditation that she would force him to understand that further acquaintance could lead to nothing profitable for either party. It pre-

sently came over her, however, that it would take some little time to explain this truth and that the time might be obtained by their walking a certain distance along the charming shore of the lake together. The windows of the hotel and of the little water-side houses and villas projected over the place long shafts of lamplight which shimmered on the water, broken by the slow-moving barges laden with musicians, and gave the whole region the air of an illuminated garden surrounding a magnificent pond. Agatha made the further reflection that it would be only common kindness to give Sir Rufus an opportunity to say anything he wished to say; that is within the limits she was prepared to allow: they had been too good friends to separate without some of the forms of regret, without a backward look at least, since they might not enjoy a forward one. In short she had taken in the morning a resolution so virtuous, founded on so high and large a view of the whole situation, that she felt herself entitled to some reward, some present liberty of action. She turned away from her relatives with Sir Rufus—she observed that they paid no attention to her—and in a few moments she was strolling by his side at a certain distance from the hotel.

‘I will tell you what I should like to do,’ he said, as they went; ‘I should like to turn up in Venice—about a week hence.’

‘I don’t recommend you to do that,’ the girl replied, promptly enough; though as soon as she had spoken she bethought herself that she could give him no definite reason why he should not follow her; she could give him no reason at all that would not be singularly wanting in delicacy. She had a move-

ment of vexation with her brother for having put her in a false position ; it was the first, for in the morning when her mother repeated to her what Macarthy had said and she perceived all that it implied she had not been in the least angry with him—she sometimes indeed wondered why she was not—and she did not propose to become so for Sir Rufus Chasemore. What she had been was sad—touched too with a sense of horror—horror at the idea that she might be in danger of denying, under the influence of an insinuating alien, the pieties and sanctities in which she had been brought up. Sir Rufus *was* a tremendous conservative, though perhaps that did not matter so much, and he had let her know at an early stage of their acquaintance that he had never liked Americans in the least as a people. As it was apparent that he liked her—all American and very American as she was—she had regarded this shortcoming only in its minor bearings, and it had even gratified her to form a private project of converting him to a friendlier view. If she had not found him a charming man she would not have cared what he thought about her country - people ; but, as it happened, she did find him a charming man, and it grieved her to see a mind that was really worthy of the finest initiations (as regarded the American question) wasting itself on poor prejudices. Somehow, by showing him how nice she was herself she could make him like the people better with whom she had so much in common, and as he admitted that his observation of them had after all been very restricted she would also make him know them better. This prospect drew her on till suddenly her brother sounded the note of warning. When it came she

understood it perfectly ; she could not pretend that she did not. If she were not careful she would give her country away : in the privacy of her own room she had coloured up to her hair at the thought. She had a lurid vision in which the chance seemed to be greater that Sir Rufus Chasemore would bring her over to his side than that she should make him like anything he had begun by disliking ; so that she resisted, with the conviction that the complications which might arise from allowing a prejudiced Englishman to possess himself, as he evidently desired to do, of her affections, would be much greater than a sensitive girl with other loyalties to observe might be able to manage. A moment after she had said to her companion that she did not recommend him to come to Venice she added that of course he was free to do as he liked : only why should he come if he was sure the place was so uncomfortable ? To this Sir Rufus replied that it signified little how uncomfortable it was if she should be there and that there was nothing he would not put up with for the sake of a few days more of her society.

‘Oh, if it’s for that you are coming,’ the girl replied, laughing and feeling nervous—feeling that something was in the air which she had wished precisely to keep out of it—‘Oh, if it’s for that you are coming you had very much better not take the trouble. You would have very little of my society. While my brother is with us all my time will be given up to him.’

‘Confound your brother !’ Sir Rufus exclaimed. Then he went on : ‘You told me yourself he wouldn’t be with you long. After he’s gone you will be free again and you will still be in Venice,

shan't you? I do want to float in a gondola with you.'

'It's very possible my brother may be with us for weeks.'

Sir Rufus hesitated a moment. 'I see what you mean—that he won't leave you so long as I am about the place. In that case if you are so fond of him you ought to take it as a kindness of me to hover about.' Before the girl had time to make a rejoinder to this ingenious proposition he added, 'Why in the world has he taken such a dislike to me?'

'I know nothing of any dislike,' Agatha said, not very honestly. 'He has expressed none to me.'

'He has to me then. He quite loathes me.'

She was silent a little; then she inquired, 'And do you like him very much?'

'I think he's immense fun! He's very clever, like most of the Americans I have seen, including yourself. I should like to show him I like him, and I have salaamed and kowtowed to him whenever I had a chance; but he won't let me get near him. Hang it, it's cruel!'

'It's not directed to you in particular, any dislike he may have. I have told you before that he doesn't like the English,' Agatha remarked.

'Bless me—no more do I! But my best friends have been among them.'

'I don't say I agree with my brother and I don't say I disagree with him,' Sir Rufus's companion went on. 'I have told you before that we are of Irish descent, on my mother's side. Her mother was a Macarthy. We have kept up the name and we have kept up the feeling.'

'I see—so that even if the Yankee were to let me



off the Paddy would come down! That's a most unholy combination. But you remember, I hope, what I have also told you—that I am quite as Irish as you can ever be. I had an Irish grandmother—a beauty of beauties, a certain Lady Laura Fitzgibbon, *qui vaut bien la vôtre*. A charming old woman she was.'

'Oh, well, she wasn't of our kind!' the girl exclaimed, laughing.

'You mean that yours wasn't charming? In the presence of her granddaughter permit me to doubt it.'

'Well, I suppose that those hostilities of race—transmitted and hereditary, as it were—are the greatest of all.' Agatha Grice uttered this sage reflection by no means in the tone of successful controversy and with the faintest possible tremor in her voice.

'Good God! do you mean to say that an hostility of race, a legendary feud, is to prevent you and me from meeting again?' The Englishman stopped short as he made this inquiry, but Agatha continued to walk, as if that might help her to elude it. She had come out with a perfectly sincere determination to prevent Sir Rufus from saying what she believed he wanted to say, and if her voice had trembled just now it was because it began to come over her that her preventive measures would fail. The only tolerably efficacious one would be to turn straight round and go home. But there would be a rudeness in this course and even a want of dignity; and besides she did not wish to go home. She compromised by not answering her companion's question, and though she could not see him she was aware

that he was looking after her with an expression in his face of high impatience momentarily baffled. She knew that expression and thought it handsome; she knew all his expressions and thought them all handsome. He overtook her in a few moments and then she was surprised that he should be laughing as he exclaimed: 'It's too absurd!—it's too absurd!' It was not long however before she understood the nature of his laughter, as she understood everything else. If she was nervous he was scarcely less so; his whole manner now expressed the temper of a man wishing to ascertain rapidly whether he may enjoy or must miss great happiness. Before she knew it he had spoken the words which she had flattered herself he should not speak; he had said that since there appeared to be a doubt whether they should soon meet again it was important he should seize the present occasion. He was very glad after all, because for several days he had been wanting to speak. He loved her as he had never loved any woman and he besought her earnestly to believe it. What was this crude stuff about disliking the English and disliking the Americans? what had questions of nationality to do with it any more than questions of ornithology? It was a question simply of being his wife, and that was rather between themselves, was it not? He besought her to consider it, as *he* had been turning it over from almost the first hour he met her. It was not in Agatha's power to go her way now, because he had laid his hand upon her in a manner that kept her motionless, and while he talked to her in low, kind tones, touching her face with the breath of supplication, she stood there in the warm darkness, very pale, looking as if she were listening to a threat

of injury rather than to a declaration of love. 'Of course I ought to speak to your mother,' he said; 'I ought to have spoken to her first. But your leaving at an hour's notice and apparently wishing to shake me off has given me no time. For God's sake give me your permission and I will do it to-night.'

'Don't—don't speak to my mother,' said Agatha, mournfully.

'Don't tell me to-morrow then that she won't hear of it!'

'She likes you, Sir Rufus,' the girl rejoined, in the same singular, hopeless tone.

'I hope you don't mean to imply by that that you don't!'

'No; I like you of course; otherwise I should never have allowed myself to be in this position, because I hate it!' The girl uttered these last words with a sudden burst of emotion and an equally sudden failure of sequence, and turning round quickly began to walk in the direction from which they had come. Her companion, however, was again beside her, close to her, and he found means to prevent her from going as fast as she wished. History has lost the record of what at that moment he said to her; it was something that made her exclaim in a voice which seemed on the point of breaking into tears: 'Please don't say that or anything like it again, Sir Rufus, or I shall have to take leave of you for ever this instant, on the spot.' He strove to be obedient and they walked on a little in silence; after which she resumed, with a slightly different manner: 'I am very sorry you have said this to-night. You have troubled and distressed me; it isn't a good time.'

‘I wonder if you would favour me with your idea of what might be a good time?’

‘I don’t know. Perhaps never. I am greatly obliged to you for the honour you have done me. I beg you to believe me when I say this. But I don’t think I shall ever marry. I have other duties. I can’t do what I like with my life.’

At this Sir Rufus made her stop again, to tell him what she meant by such an extraordinary speech. What overwhelming duties had she, pray, and what restrictions upon her life that made her so different from other women? He could not, for his part, imagine a woman more free. She explained that she had her mother, who was terribly delicate and who must be her first thought and her first care. Nothing would induce her to leave her mother. She was all her mother had except Macarthy, and he was absorbed in his profession.

‘What possible question need there be of your leaving her?’ the Englishman demanded. ‘What could be more delightful than that she should live with us and that we should take care of her together? You say she is so good as to like me, and I assure you I like *her*—most uncommonly.’

‘It would be impossible that we should take her away from my brother,’ said the girl, after an hesitation.

‘Take her away?’ And Sir Rufus Chasemore stood staring. ‘Well, if he won’t look after her himself—you say he is so taken up with his work—he has no earthly right to prevent other people from doing so.’

‘It’s not a man’s business—it’s mine—it’s her daughter’s.’

‘That’s exactly what I think, and what in the world do I wish but to help you? If she requires a mild climate we will find some lovely place in the south of England and be as happy there as the day is long.’

‘So that Macarthy would have to come *there* to see his mother?’ Fancy Macarthy in the south of England—especially as happy as the day is long! He would find the day very long,’ Agatha Grice continued, with the strange little laugh which expressed—or rather which disguised—the mixture of her feelings. ‘He would never consent.’

‘Never consent to what? Is what you mean to say that he would never consent to your marriage? I certainly never dreamed that you would have to ask him. Haven’t you defended to me again and again the freedom, the independence with which American girls marry? Where is the independence when it comes to your own case?’ Sir Rufus Chasemore paused a moment and then he went on with bitterness: ‘Why don’t you say outright that you are afraid of your brother? Miss Grice, I never dreamed that that would be your answer to an offer of everything that a man—and a man of some distinction, I may say, for it would be affectation in me to pretend that I consider myself a nonentity—can lay at the feet of a woman.’

The girl did not reply immediately; she appeared to think over intently what he had said to her, and while she did so she turned her white face and her charming serious eyes upon him. When at last she spoke it was in a very gentle, considerate tone. ‘You are wrong in supposing that I am afraid of my brother. How can I be afraid of a person of whom I am so exceedingly fond?’

'Oh, the two things are quite consistent,' said Sir Rufus Chasemore, impatiently. 'And is it impossible that I should ever inspire you with a sentiment which you would consent to place in the balance with this intense fraternal affection?' He had no sooner spoken those somewhat sarcastic words than he broke out in a different tone: 'Oh Agatha, for pity's sake don't make difficulties where there are no difficulties!'

'I don't make them; I assure you they exist. It is difficult to explain them, but I can see them, I can feel them. Therefore we mustn't talk this way any more. Please, please don't,' the girl pursued, imploringly. 'Nothing is possible to-day. Some day or other very likely there will be changes. Then we shall meet; then we shall talk again.'

'I like the way you ask me to wait ten years. What do you mean by "changes"? Before heaven, I shall never change,' Sir Rufus declared.

Agatha Grice hesitated. 'Well, perhaps you will like us better.'

'Us? Whom do you mean by "us"? Are you coming back to that beastly question of one's feelings—real or supposed it doesn't matter—about your great and glorious country? Good God, it's too monstrous! One tells a girl one adores her and she replies that she doesn't care so long as one doesn't adore her compatriots. What do you want me to do to them? What do you want me to say? I will say anything in the English language, or in the American, that you like. I'll say that they're the greatest of the great and have every charm and virtue under heaven. I'll go down on my stomach before them and remain there for ever. I can't do more than that!'



Whether this extravagant profession had the effect of making Agatha Grice ashamed of having struck that note in regard to her companion's international attitude, or whether her nerves were simply upset by his vehemence, his insistence, is more than I can say: what is certain is that her rejoinder to this last speech was a sudden burst of tears. They fell for a moment rapidly, soundlessly, but she was quicker still in brushing them away. 'You may laugh at me or you may despise me,' she said when she could speak, 'and I daresay my state of mind is deplorably narrow. But I couldn't be happy with you if you hated my country.'

'You would hate mine back and we should pass the liveliest, jolliest days!' returned the Englishman, gratified, softened, enchanted by her tears. 'My dear girl, what is a woman's country? It's her house and her garden, her children and her social world. You exaggerate immensely the difference which that part of the business makes. I assure you that if you were to marry me it would be the last thing you would find yourself thinking of. However, to prove how little I hate your country I am perfectly willing to go there and live with you.'

'Oh, Sir Rufus Chasemore!' murmured Agatha Grice, protestingly.

'You don't believe me?'

She believed him not a bit and yet to hear him make such an offer was sweet to her, for it gave her a sense of the reality of his passion. 'I shouldn't ask that—I shouldn't even like it,' she said; and then he wished to know what she would like. 'I should like you to let me go—not to press me, not



to distress me any more now. I shall think of everything—of course you know that. But it will take me a long time. That's all I can tell you now, but I think you ought to be content.' He was obliged to say that he was content, and they resumed their walk in the direction of the hotel. Shortly before they reached it Agatha exclaimed with a certain irrelevance, 'You ought to go there first; then you would know.'

'Then I should know what?'

'Whether you would like it.'

'Like your great country? Good Lord, what difference does it make whether I like it or not?'

'No—that's just it—you don't care,' said Agatha; 'yet you said to my brother that you wanted immensely to go.'

'So I do; I am ashamed not to have been; that's an immense drawback to-day, in England, to a man in public life. Something has always stopped me off, tiresomely, from year to year. Of course I shall go the very first moment I can take the time.'

'It's a pity you didn't go this year instead of coming down here,' the girl observed, rather sentimentally.

'I thank my stars I didn't!' he responded, in a very different tone.

'Well, I should try to make you like it,' she went on. 'I think it very probable I should succeed.'

'I think it very probable you could do with me exactly whatever you might attempt.'

'Oh, you hypocrite!' the girl exclaimed; and it was on this that she separated from him and went into the house. It soothed him to see her do so

instead of rejoining her mother and brother, whom he distinguished at a distance sitting on the terrace. She had perceived them there as well, but she would go straight to her room; she preferred the company of her thoughts. It suited Sir Rufus Chasemore to believe that those thoughts would plead for him and eventually win his suit. He gave a melancholy, loverlike sigh, however, as he walked toward Mrs. Grice and her son. He could not keep away from them, though he was so interested in being and appearing discreet. The girl had told him that her mother liked him, and he desired both to stimulate and to reward that inclination. Whatever he desired he desired with extreme definiteness and energy. He would go and sit down beside the little old lady (with whom hitherto he had no very direct conversation), and talk to her and be kind to her and amuse her. It must be added that he rather despaired of the success of these arts as he saw Macarthy Grice, on becoming aware of his approach, get up and walk away.

#### IV

‘IT sometimes seems to me as if he didn’t marry on purpose to make me feel badly.’ That was the only fashion, as yet, in which Lady Chasemore had given away her brother to her husband. The words fell from her lips some five years after Macarthy’s visit to the lake of Como—two years after her mother’s death—a twelvemonth after her marriage. The same idea came into her mind—a trifle whimsically perhaps, only this time she forbore to express it—as she stood by her husband’s side, on the deck of the steamer, half an hour before they reached the wharf at New York. Six years had elapsed between the scenes at Cadenabbia and their disembarkation in that city. Agatha knew that Macarthy would be on the wharf to meet them, and that he should be there alone was natural enough. But she had a prevision of their return with him—she also knew he expected that—to the house, so narrow but fortunately rather deep, in Thirty-seventh street, in which such a happy trio had lived in the old days before this unexpressed but none the less perceptible estrangement. As her marriage had taken place in Europe (Sir Rufus coming to her at Bologna, in the very midst of the Parliamentary session, the moment

he heard, by his sister, of her mother's death : this was really the sign of devotion that had won her) ; as the ceremony of her nuptials, I say—a very simple one—had been performed in Paris, so that her absence from her native land had had no intermission, she had not seen the house since she left it with her mother for that remedial pilgrimage in the course of which poor Mrs. Grice, travelling up from Rome in the spring, after her third winter there (two had been so far from sufficing), was to succumb, from one day to the other, to inflammation of the lungs. She saw it over again now, even before she left the ship, and felt in advance all that it would imply to find Macarthy living there as a bachelor, struggling with New York servants, unaided and unrelieved by the sister whose natural place might by many people have been thought to be the care of his establishment, as her natural reward would have been the honours of such a position. Lady Chasemore was prepared to feel pang upon pang when she should perceive how much less comfortably he lived than he would have lived if she had not quitted him. She knew that their second cousins in Boston, whose sense of duty was so terrible (even her poor mother, who never had a thought for herself, used to try as much as possible to conceal her life from them), considered that she had in a manner almost immoral deserted him for the sake of an English title. When they went ashore and drove home with Macarthy Agatha received exactly the impression she had expected : her brother's life struck her as bare, ungarnished, helpless, socially and domestically speaking. He had not the art of keeping house, naturally, and in New York, unless one were a good deal richer than

he, it was very difficult to do that sort of thing by deputy. But Lady Chasemore made no further allusion to the idea that he remained single out of perversity. The situation was too serious for that or for any other flippant speech.

It was a delicate matter for the brothers-in-law to spend two or three weeks together; not however because when the moment for her own real decision came Macarthy had protested in vivid words against her marriage. By the time he arrived from America after his mother's death the Englishman was in possession of the field and it was too late to save her. He had had the opportunity to show her kindness for which her situation made her extremely grateful—he had indeed rendered her services which Macarthy himself, though he knew they were the result of an interested purpose, could not but appreciate. When her brother met her in Paris he saw that she was already lost to him: she had ceased to struggle, she had accepted the fate of a Briton's bride. It appeared that she was much in love with her Briton—that was necessarily the end of it. Macarthy offered no opposition, and she would have liked it better if he had, as it would have given her a chance to put him in the wrong a little more than, formally at least, she had been able to do. He knew that she knew what he thought and how he felt, and there was no need of saying any more about it. No doubt he would not have accepted a sacrifice from her even if she had been capable of making it (there were moments when it seemed to her that even at the last, if he had appealed to her directly and with tenderness, she would have renounced); but it was none the less clear to her that he was deeply

disappointed at her having found it in her heart to separate herself so utterly. And there was something in his whole attitude which seemed to say that it was not only from him that she separated herself, but from all her fellow-countrymen besides and from everything that was best and finest in American life. He regarded her marriage as an abjuration, an apostasy, a kind of moral treachery. It was of no use to say to him that she was doing nothing original or extraordinary, to ask him if he did not know that in England, at the point things had come to, American wives were as thick as blackberries, so that if she were doing wrong she was doing wrong with—well, almost the majority: for he had an answer to such cheap arguments, an answer according to which it appeared that the American girls who had done what she was about to do were notoriously poor specimens, the most frivolous and feather-headed young persons in the country. They had no conception of the great meaning of American institutions, no appreciation of their birthright, and they were doubtless very worthy recruits to a debauched and stultified aristocracy. The pity of Agatha's desertion was that *she* had been meant for better things, she had appreciated her birthright, or if she had not it had not been the fault of a brother who had taken so much pains to form her mind and character. The sentiment of her nationality had been cultivated in her; it was not a mere brute instinct or customary prejudice—it was a responsibility, a faith, a religion. She was not a poor specimen but a remarkably fine one; she was intelligent, she was clever, she was sensitive, she could understand difficult things and feel great ones.



Of course in those days of trouble in Paris, when it was arranged that she should be married immediately (as if there had really been an engagement to Sir Rufus from the night before their flight from Cadenabbia), of course she had had a certain amount of talk with Macarthy about the matter, and at such moments she had almost wished to drive him to protest articulately, so that she might as explicitly reassure him, endeavour to bring him round. But he had never said to her personally what he had said to her mother at Cadenabbia—what her mother, frightened and distressed, had immediately repeated to her. The most he said was that he hoped she was conscious of all the perfectly different and opposed things she and her husband would represent when they should find themselves face to face. He hoped she had measured in advance the strain that might arise from the fact that in so many ways her good would be his evil, her white his black and *vice versa*—the fact in a word that by birth, tradition, convictions, she was the product of a democratic society, while the very breath of Sir Rufus's nostrils was the denial of human equality. She had replied, 'Oh yes, I have thought of everything;' but in reality she had not thought that she was in any very aggressive manner a democrat or even that she had a representative function. She had not thought that Macarthy in his innermost soul was a democrat either; and she had even wondered what would happen if in regard to some of those levelling theories he had suddenly been taken at his word. She knew however that nothing would have made him more angry than to hint that anything could happen which would find him unprepared, and she was ashamed to repudiate



the opinions, the general character her brother attributed to her, to fall below the high standard he had set up for her. She had moreover no wish to do so. She was well aware that there were many things in English life that she should not like, and she was never a more passionate American than the day she married Sir Rufus Chasemore.

To what extent she remained one an observer of the deportment of this young lady would at first have had considerable difficulty in judging. The question of the respective merits of the institutions of the two countries came up very little in her life. Her husband had other things to think of than the great republic beyond the sea, and her horizon, social and political, had practically the same large but fixed line as his. Sir Rufus was immersed in politics and in administrative questions; but these things belonged wholly to the domestic field; they were embodied in big blue-books with terrible dry titles (Agatha had tried conscientiously to acquaint herself with the contents of some of them), which piled themselves up on the table of his library. The conservatives had come into power just after his marriage, and he had held honourable though not supereminent office. His duties had nothing to do with foreign relations; they were altogether of an economical and statistical kind. He performed them in a manner which showed perhaps that he was conscious of some justice in the reproach usually addressed to the Tories—the taunt that they always came to grief in the department of industry and finance. His wife was sufficiently in his confidence to know how much he had it at heart to prove that a conservative administration could be strong in

ciphering. He never spoke to her of her own country—they had so many other things to talk about—but if there was nothing in his behaviour to betray the assumption that she had given it up, so on the other hand there was nothing to show that he doubted of her having done so. What he had said about a woman's country being her husband and children, her house and garden and visiting list, was very considerably verified ; for it was certain that her ladyship's new career gave her, though she had no children, plenty of occupation. Even if it had not however she would have found a good deal of work to her hand in loving her husband, which she continued to do with the most commendable zeal. He seemed to her a very magnificent person, bullying her not half so much as she expected. There were times when it even occurred to her that he really did not bully her enough, for she had always had an idea that it would be agreeable to be subjected to this probation by some one she should be very fond of.

After they had been married a year he became a permanent official, in succession to a gentleman who was made a peer on his retirement from the post to which Sir Rufus was appointed. This gave Lady Chasemore an opportunity to reflect that she might some day be a peeress, it being reasonable to suppose that the same reward would be meted out to her husband on the day on which, in the fulness of time and of credit, he also should retire. She was obliged to admit to herself that the reflection was unattended with any sense of horror ; it exhilarated her indeed to the point of making her smile at the contingency of Macarthy's finding himself the brother of a member

of the aristocracy. As a permanent official her husband was supposed to have no active political opinions ; but she could not flatter herself that she perceived any diminution of his conservative zeal. Even if she had done so it would have made little difference, for it had not taken her long to discover that she had married into a tremendous Tory 'set' —a set in which people took for granted she had feelings that she was not prepared to publish on the housetops. It was scarcely worth while however to explain at length that she had not been brought up in that way, partly because the people would not have understood and partly because really after all they did not care. How little it was possible in general to care her career in England helped her in due time to discover. The people who cared least appeared to be those who were most convinced that everything in the national life was going to the dogs. Lady Chasemore was not struck with this tendency herself ; but if she had been the belief would have worried her more than it seemed to worry her friends. She liked most of them extremely and thought them very kind, very easy to live with ; but she liked London much better than the country, rejoiced much when her husband's new post added to the number of months he would have annually to spend there (they ended by being there as much as any one), and had grave doubts as to whether she would have been able to 'stand' it if her lot had been cast among those members of her new circle who lived mainly on their acres.

All the same, though what she had to bear she bore very easily, she indulged in a good deal of private meditation on some of the things that

failed to catch her sympathy. She did not always mention them to her husband, but she always intended to mention them. She desired he should not think that she swallowed his country whole, that she was stupidly indiscriminating. Of course he knew that she was not stupid and of course also he knew that she could not fail to be painfully impressed by the misery and brutality of the British populace. She had never anywhere else seen anything like that. Of course, furthermore, she knew that Sir Rufus had given and would give in the future a great deal of thought to legislative measures directed to elevating gradually the condition of the lower orders. It came over Lady Chasemore at times that it would be well if some of these measures might arrive at maturity with as little delay as possible.

The night before she quitted England with her husband they slept at an hotel at Liverpool, in order to embark early on the morrow. Sir Rufus went out to attend to some business and, the evening being very close, she sat at the window of their sitting-room and looked out on a kind of square which stretched in front of the hotel. The night was muggy, the window was open and she was held there by a horrible fascination. Dusky forms of vice and wretchedness moved about in the stuffy darkness, visions of grimy, half-naked, whining beggary hovered before her, curses and the sound of blows came to her ears ; there were young girls, frousy and violent, who evidently were drunk, as every one seemed to be, more or less, which was little wonder, as four public-houses flared into the impure night, visible from where Lady Chasemore sat, and they appeared to be gorged with customers, half of whom

were women. The impression came back to her that the horrible place had made upon her and upon her mother when they landed in England years before, and as she turned from the window she liked to think that she was going to a country where, at any rate, there would be less of that sort of thing. When her husband came in he said it was of course a beastly place but much better than it used to be—which she was glad to hear. She made some allusion to the confidence they might have that they should be treated to no such scenes as that in *her* country: whereupon he remonstrated, jocosely expressing a hope that they should not be deprived of a glimpse of the celebrated American drinks and bar-room fights.

It must be added that in New York he made of his brother-in-law no inquiry about these phenomena—a reserve, a magnanimity keenly appreciated by his wife. She appreciated altogether the manner in which he conducted himself during their visit to the United States and felt that if she had not already known that she had married a perfect gentleman the fact would now have been revealed to her. For she had to make up her mind to this, that after all (it was vain to shut one's eyes to it) Sir Rufus personally did not like the United States: he did not like them yet he made an immense effort to behave as if he did. She was grateful to him for that; it assuaged her nervousness (she was afraid there might be 'scenes' if he should break out with some of his displeasures); so grateful that she almost forgot to be disappointed at the failure of her own original intent, to be distressed at seeing or rather at guessing (for he was reserved about it even to her), that



a nearer view of American institutions had not had the effect which she once promised herself a nearer view should have. She had married him partly to bring him over to an admiration of her country (she had never told any one this, for she was too proud to make the confidence to an English person and if she had made it to an American the answer would have been so prompt, 'What on earth does it signify what he thinks of it?' no one, of course, being obliged to understand that it might signify to *her*); she had united herself to Sir Rufus in this missionary spirit and now not only did her proselyte prove unamenable but the vanity of her enterprise became a fact of secondary importance. She wondered a little that she did not suffer more from it, and this is partly why she rejoiced that her husband kept most of his observations to himself: it gave her a pretext for not being ashamed. She had flattered herself before that in general he had the manners of a diplomatist (she did not suspect that this was not the opinion of all his contemporaries), and his behaviour during the first few weeks at least of their stay in the western world struck her as a triumph of diplomacy. She had really passed from caring whether he disliked American manners to caring primarily whether he showed he disliked them—a transition which on her own side she was very sensible it was important to conceal from Macarthy. To love a man who could feel no tenderness for the order of things which had encompassed her early years and had been intimately mixed with her growth, which was a part of the conscience, the piety of many who had been most dear to her and whose memory would be dear to her always—that was an



irregularity which was after all shut up in her own breast, where she could trust her dignity to get some way or other the upper hand of it. But to be pointed at as having such a problem as that on one's back was quite another affair; it was a kind of exposure of one's sanctities, a surrender of private judgment. Lady Chasemore had by this time known her husband long enough to enter into the logic of his preferences; if he disliked or disapproved what he saw in America his reasons for doing so had ceased to be a mystery. They were the very elements of his character, the joints and vertebration of his general creed. All the while she was absent from England with him (it was not very long, their whole tour, including the two voyages, being included in ten weeks), she knew more or less the impression that things would have made upon him; she knew that both in the generals and in the particulars American life would have gone against his grain, contradicted his traditions, violated his taste.

## V

ALL the same he was determined to see it thoroughly, and this is doubtless one of the reasons why after the first few days she cherished the hope that they should be able to get off at the end without any collision with Macarthy. Of course it was to be taken into account that Macarthy's own demeanour was much more that of a man of the world than she had ventured to hope. He appeared for the time almost to have smothered his national consciousness, which had always been so acute, and to have accepted his sister's perfidious alliance. She could see that he was delighted that she should be near him again—so delighted that he neglected to look for the signs of corruption in her or to manifest any suspicion that in fact, now that she was immersed in them again, she regarded her old associations with changed eyes. So, also, if she had not already been aware of how much Macarthy was a gentleman she would have seen it from the way he rose to the occasion. Accordingly they were all superior people and all was for the best in Lady Chasemore's simple creed. Her brother asked her no questions whatever about her life in England, but his letters had already enlightened her as to his determination to avoid that

topic. They had hitherto not contained a single inquiry on the subject of her occupations and pursuits, and if she had been domiciled in the moon he could not have indulged in less reference to public or private events in the British islands. It was a tacit form of disapprobation of her being connected with that impertinent corner of the globe ; but it had never prevented her from giving him the fullest information on everything he never asked about. He never took up her allusions, and when she poured forth information to him now in regard to matters concerning her life in her new home (on these points she was wilfully copious and appealing), he listened with a sort of exaggerated dumb deference, as if she were reciting a lesson and he must sit quiet till she should come to the end. Usually when she stopped he simply sighed, then directed the conversation to something as different as possible. It evidently pleased him however to see that she enjoyed her native air and her temporary reunion with some of her old familiars. This was a graceful inconsistency on his part : it showed that he had not completely given her up. Perhaps he thought Sir Rufus would die and that in this case she would come back and live in New York. She was careful not to tell him that such a calculation was baseless, that with or without Sir Rufus she should never be able to settle in her native city as Lady Chasemore. He was scrupulously polite to Sir Rufus, and this personage asked Agatha why he never by any chance addressed him save by his title. She could see what her husband meant, but even in the privacy of the conjugal chamber she was loyal enough to Macarthy not to reply, ' Oh, it's a mercy he doesn't say simply " Sir !"'

The English visitor was prodigiously active ; he desired to leave nothing unexplored, unattempted ; his purpose was to inspect institutions, to collect statistics, to talk with the principal people, to see the workings of the political machine, and Macarthy acquitted himself scrupulously, even zealously, in the way of giving him introductions and facilities. Lady Chasemore reflected with pleasure that it was in her brother's power to do the honours of his native land very completely. She suspected indeed that as he did not like her husband (he *couldn't* like him, in spite of Sir Rufus's now comportsing himself so sweetly), it was a relief to him to pass him on to others—to work him off, as it were, into penitentiaries and chambers of commerce. Sir Rufus's frequent expeditions to these establishments and long interviews with local worthies of every kind kept him constantly out of the house and removed him from contact with his host, so that as Macarthy was extremely busy with his own profession (Sir Rufus was greatly struck with the way he worked ; he had never seen a gentleman work so hard, without any shooting or hunting or fishing), it may be said, though it sounds odd, that the two men met very little directly—met scarcely more than in the evening or in other words always in company. During the twenty days the Chasemores spent together in New York they either dined out or were members of a party given at home by Macarthy, and on these occasions Sir Rufus found plenty to talk about with his new acquaintance. His wife flattered herself he was liked, he was so hilarious and so easy. He had a very appreciative manner, but she really wished sometimes that he might have subdued his hilarity a little ; there were

moments when perhaps it looked as if he took everything in the United States as if it were more than all else amusing. She knew exactly how it must privately affect Macarthy, this implication that it was merely a comical country; but after all it was not very easy to say how Macarthy would have preferred that a stranger, or that Sir Rufus in particular, should take the great republic. A cheerful view, yet untinged by the sense of drollery—that would have been the right thing if it could have been arrived at. At all events (and this was something gained), if Sir Rufus was in his heart a pessimist in regard to things he did not like he was not superficially sardonic. And then he asked questions by the million; and what was curiosity but an homage?

It will be inferred, and most correctly, that Macarthy Grice was not personally in any degree for his brother-in-law the showman of the exhibition. He caused him to be conducted, but he did not conduct him. He listened to his reports of what he had seen (it was at breakfast mainly that these fresh intimations dropped from Sir Rufus's lips), with very much the same cold patience (as if he were civilly forcing his attention) with which he listened to Agatha's persistent anecdotes of things that had happened to her in England. Of course with Sir Rufus there could be no question of persistence; he cared too little whether Macarthy cared or not and he did not stick to this everlasting subject of American institutions either to entertain him or to entertain himself—all he wanted was to lead on to further researches and discoveries. Macarthy always met him with the same response, 'Oh, So-and-So is

the man to tell you all about that. If you wish I will give you a letter to him.' Sir Rufus always wished and certainly Macarthy wrote a prodigious number of letters. The inquiries and conclusions of his visitor (so far as Sir Rufus indulged in the latter) all bore on special points; he was careful to commit himself to no crude generalisations. He had to remember that he had still the rest of the country to see, and after a little discussion (which was confined to Lady Chasemore and her husband) it was decided that he should see it without his wife, who would await his return among her friends in New York. This arrangement was much to her taste, but it gives again the measure of the degree to which she had renounced her early dream of interpreting the western world to Sir Rufus. If she was not to be at his side at the moment, on the spot, of course she could not interpret—he would get a tremendous start of her. In short by staying quietly with Macarthy during his absence she almost gave up the great advantage she had hitherto had of knowing more about America than her husband could. She liked however to feel that she was making a sacrifice—making one indeed both to Sir Rufus and to her brother. The idea of giving up something for Macarthy (she only wished it had been something more) did her great good—sweetened the period of her husband's absence.

The whole season had been splendid, but at this moment the golden days of the Indian summer descended upon the shining city and steeped it in a kind of fragrant haze. For two or three weeks New York seemed to Lady Chasemore poetical; the marble buildings looked yellow in the sleeping sun-



shine and her native land exhibited for the occasion an atmosphere. Vague memories came back to her of her younger years, of things that had to do somehow with the blurred brightness of the late autumn in the country. She walked about, she walked irresponsibly for hours ; she did not care, as she had to care in London. She met friends in the streets and turned and walked with them ; and pleasures as simple as this acquired an exaggerated charm for her. She liked walking and as an American girl had indulged the taste freely ; but in London she had no time but to drive—besides which there were other tiresome considerations. Macarthy came home from his office earlier and she went to meet him in Washington Square and walked up the Fifth Avenue with him in the rich afternoon. It was many years since she had been in New York and she found herself taking a kind of relapsing interest in changes and improvements. There were houses she used to know, where friends had lived in the old days and where they lived no more (no one in New York seemed to her to live where they used to live), which reminded her of incidents she had long ago forgotten, incidents that it pleased and touched her now to recall. Macarthy became very easy and sociable ; he even asked her a few questions about her arrangements and habits in England and struck her (though she had never been particularly aware of it before) as having a great deal of the American humour. On one occasion he stayed away from work altogether and took her up the Hudson, on the steamer, to West Point—an excursion in which she found a peculiar charm. Every day she lunched intimately with a dozen ladies, at the house of one or other of them.

In due time Sir Rufus returned from Canada, the Mississippi, the Rocky Mountains and California ; he had achieved marvels in the way of traversing distances and seeing manners and men with rapidity and facility. Everything had been settled in regard to their sailing for England almost directly after his return ; there were only to be two more days in New York, then a rush to Boston, followed by another rush to Philadelphia and Washington. Macarthy made no inquiry whatever of his brother-in-law touching his impression of the great West ; he neglected even to ask him if he had been favourably impressed with Canada. There would not have been much opportunity however, for Sir Rufus on his side was extremely occupied with the last things he had to do. He had not even time as yet to impart his impressions to his wife, and she forbore to interrogate him, feeling that the voyage close at hand would afford abundant leisure for the history of his adventures. For the moment almost the only light that he threw upon them was by saying to Agatha (not before Macarthy) that it was a pleasure to him to see a handsome woman again, as he had not had that satisfaction in the course of his travels. Lady Chasemore wondered, exclaimed, protested, eliciting from him the declaration that to his sense, and in the interior at least, the beauty of the women was, like a great many other things, a gigantic American fraud. Sir Rufus had looked for it in vain—he went so far as to say that he had, in the course of extensive wanderings about the world, seen no female type on the whole less to his taste than that of the ladies in whose society, in hundreds (there was no paucity of specimens), in the long, hot,

heaving trains, he had traversed a large part of the American continent. His wife inquired whether by chance he preferred the young persons they had (or at least she had) observed at Liverpool the night before their departure ; to which he replied that they were no doubt sad creatures, but that the looks of a woman mattered only so long as one lived with her, and he did not live, and never should live, with the daughters of that grimy seaport. With the women in the American cars he had been living—oh, tremendously ! and they were deucedly plain. Thereupon Lady Chasemore wished to know whether he did not think Mrs. Eugene had beauty, and Mrs. Ripley, and her sister Mrs. Redwood, and Mrs. Long, and several other ornaments of the society in which they had mingled during their stay in New York. ‘Mrs. Eugene is Mrs. Eugene and Mrs. Redwood is Mrs. Redwood,’ Sir Rufus retorted ; ‘but the women in the cars weren’t either, and all the women I saw were like the women in the cars.’—‘Well, there may be something in the cars,’ said Lady Chasemore, pensively ; and she mentioned that it was very odd that during her husband’s absence, as she roamed about New York, she should have made precisely the opposite reflection and been struck with the number of pretty faces. ‘Oh, pretty faces, pretty faces, I daresay !’ But Sir Rufus had no time to develop this vague rejoinder.

When they came back from Washington to sail Agatha told her brother that he was going to write a book about America : it was for this he had made so many inquiries and taken so many notes. She had not known it before ; it was only while they were in Washington that he told her he had made

up his mind to it. Something he saw or heard in Washington appeared to have brought this resolution to a point. Lady Chasemore privately thought it rather a formidable fact; her husband had startled her a good deal in announcing his intention. She had said, 'Of course it will be friendly—you'll say nice things?' And he had replied, 'My poor child, they will abuse me like a pickpocket.' This had scarcely been reassuring, so that she had had it at heart to probe the question further, in the train, after they left Washington. But as it happened, in the train, all the way, Sir Rufus was engaged in conversation with a Democratic Congressman whom he had picked up she did not know how—very certainly he had not met him at any respectable house in Washington. They sat in front of her in the car, with their heads almost touching, and although she was a better American than her husband she should not have liked hers to be so close to that of the Democratic Congressman. Now of course she knew that Sir Rufus was taking in material for his book. This idea made her uncomfortable and she would have liked immensely to separate him from his companion—she scarcely knew why, after all, except that she could not believe the Representative represented anything very nice. She promised herself to ascertain thoroughly, after they should be comfortably settled in the ship, the animus with which the book was to be written. She was a very good sailor and she liked to talk at sea; there her husband would not be able to escape from her, and she foresaw the manner in which she should catechise him. It exercised her greatly in advance and she was more agitated than she could easily have expressed by

the whole question of the book. Meanwhile, however, she was careful not to show her agitation to Macarthy. She referred to her husband's project as casually as possible, and the reason she referred to it was that this seemed more loyal—more loyal to Macarthy. If the book, when written, should attract attention by the severity of its criticism (and that by many qualities it would attract attention of the widest character Lady Chasemore could not doubt), she should feel more easy not to have had the air of concealing from her brother that such a work was in preparation, which would also be the air of having a bad conscience about it. It was to prove, both to herself and Macarthy, that she had a good conscience that she told him of Sir Rufus's design. The habit of detachment from matters connected with his brother-in-law's activity was strong in him ; nevertheless he was not able to repress some sign of emotion—he flushed very perceptibly. Quickly, however, he recovered his appearance of considering that the circumstance was one in which he could not hope to interest himself much ; though the next moment he observed, with a certain inconsequence, 'I am rather sorry to hear it.'

'Why are you sorry?' asked Agatha. She was surprised and indeed gratified that he should commit himself even so far as to express regret. What she had supposed he would say, if he should say anything, was that he was obliged to her for the information, but that if it was given him with any expectation that he might be induced to read the book he must really let her know that such an expectation was extremely vain. He could have no more affinity with Sir Rufus's printed ideas than with his spoken ones.



‘Well, it will be rather disagreeable for you,’ he said, in answer to her question. ‘Unless indeed you don’t care what he says.’

‘But I do care. The book will be sure to be very able. Do you mean if it should be severe—that would be disagreeable for me? Very certainly it would ; it would put me in a false, in a ridiculous position, and I don’t see how I should bear it,’ Lady Chasemore went on, feeling that her candour was generous and wishing it to be. ‘But I shan’t allow it to be severe. To prevent that, if it’s necessary, I will write every word of it myself.’

She laughed as she took this vow, but there was nothing in Macarthy’s face to show that *he* could lend himself to a mirthful treatment of the question. ‘I think an Englishman had better look at home,’ he said, ‘and if he does so I don’t easily see how the occupation should leave him any leisure or any assurance for reading lectures to other nations. The self-complacency of your husband’s countrymen is colossal, imperturbable. Therefore, with the tight place they find themselves in to-day and with the judgment of the rest of the world upon them being what it is, it’s grotesque to see them still sitting in their old judgment-seat and pronouncing upon the shortcomings of people who are full of the life that has so long since left *them*.’ Macarthy Grice spoke slowly, mildly, with a certain dryness, as if he were delivering himself once for all and would not return to the subject. The quietness of his manner made the words solemn for his sister, and she stared at him a moment, wondering, as if they pointed to strange things which she had hitherto but imperfectly apprehended.



‘The judgment of the rest of the world—what is that?’

‘Why, that they are simply finished; that they don’t count.’

‘Oh, a nation must count which produces such men as my husband,’ Agatha rejoined, with another laugh. Macarthy was on the point of retorting that it counted as the laughing-stock of the world (that of course was something), but he checked himself and she moreover checked him by going on: ‘Why Macarthy, you ought to come out with a book yourself about the English. You would steal my husband’s thunder.’

‘Nothing would induce me to do anything of the sort; I pity them too much.’

‘You pity them?’ Lady Chasemore exclaimed. ‘It would amuse my husband to hear that.’

‘Very likely, and it would be exactly a proof of what is so pitiable—the contrast between their gross pretensions and the real facts of their condition. They have pressing upon them at once every problem, every source of weakness, every danger that can threaten the life of a people, and they have nothing to meet the situation with but their classic stupidity.’

‘Well, that has been useful to them before,’ said Lady Chasemore, smiling. Her smile was a little forced and she coloured as her brother had done when she first spoke to him. She found it impossible not to be impressed by what he said and yet she was vexed that she was, because this was far from her desire.

He looked at her as if he saw some warning in her face and continued: ‘Excuse my going so far. In this last month that we have spent together so

happily for me I had almost forgotten that you are one of them.'

Lady Chasemore said nothing—she did not deny that she was one of them. If her husband's country was denounced—after all he had not written his book yet—she felt as if such a denial would be a repudiation of one of the responsibilities she had taken in marrying him.

## VI

THE postman was at the door in Grosvenor Crescent when she came back from her drive ; the servant took the letters from his hand as she passed into the house. In the hall she stopped to see which of the letters were for her ; the butler gave her two and retained those that were for Sir Rufus. She asked him what orders Sir Rufus had given about his letters and he replied that they were to be forwarded up to the following night. This applied only to letters, not to parcels, pamphlets and books. ' But would he wish this to go, my lady ? ' the man asked, holding up a small packet ; he added that it appeared to be a kind of document. She took it from him : her eye had caught a name printed on the wrapper and though she made no great profession of literature she recognised the name as that of a distinguished publisher and the packet as a roll of proof-sheets. She turned it up and down while the servant waited ; it had quite a different look from the bundles of printed official papers which the postman was perpetually leaving and which, when she scanned the array on the hall-table in her own interest, she identified even at a distance. They were certainly the sheets, at least the first, of her husband's book—those of which

he had said to her on the steamer, on the way back from New York a year before, 'My dear child, when I tell you that you shall see them—every page of them—that you shall have complete control of them!' Since she was to have complete control of them she began with telling the butler not to forward them—to lay them on the hall-table. She went upstairs to dress—she was dining out in her husband's absence—and when she came down to re-enter her carriage she saw the packet lying where it had been placed. So many months had passed that she had ended by forgetting that the book was on the stocks; nothing had happened to remind her of it. She had believed indeed that it was not on the stocks and even that the project would die a natural death. Sir Rufus would have no time to carry it out—he had returned from America to find himself more than ever immersed in official work—and if he did not put his hand to it within two or three years at the very most he would never do so at all, for he would have lost the freshness of his impressions, on which the success of the whole thing would depend. He had his notes of course, but none the less a delay would be fatal to the production of the volume (it was to be only a volume and not a big one), inasmuch as by the time it should be published it would have to encounter the objection that everything changed in America in two or three years and no one wanted to know anything about a dead past.

Such had been the reflections with which Lady Chasemore consoled herself for the results of those inquiries she had promised herself, in New York, to make when once she should be ensconced in a sea-chair by her husband's side and which she had in fact made to her no small discomposure. Meanwhile

apparently he had stolen a march upon her, he had put his hand to *The Modern Warning* (that was to be the title, as she had learned on the ship), he had worked at it in his odd hours, he had sent it to the printers and here were the first-fruits of it. Had he had a bad conscience about it—was that the reason he had been so quiet? She did not believe much in his bad conscience, for he had been tremendously, formidably explicit when they talked the matter over; had let her know as fully as possible what he intended to do. Then it was that he relieved himself, that in the long, unoccupied hours of their fine voyage (he was in wonderful 'form' at sea) he took her into the confidence of his real impressions—made her understand how things had struck him in the United States. They had not struck him well; oh no, they had not struck him well at all! But at least he had prepared her and therefore since then he had nothing to hide. It was doubtless an accident that he appeared to have kept his work away from her, for sometimes, in other cases, he had paid her intelligence the compliment (was it not for that in part he had married her?) of supposing that she could enter into it. It was probable that in this case he had wanted first to see for himself how his chapters would look in print. Very likely even he had not written the whole book, nor even half of it; he had only written the opening pages and had them 'set up': she remembered to have heard him speak of this as a very convenient system. It would be very convenient for her as well and she should also be much interested in seeing how they looked. On the table, in their neat little packet, they seemed half to solicit her, half to warn her off.

They were still there of course when she came back from her dinner, and this time she took possession of them. She carried them upstairs and in her dressing-room, when she had been left alone in her wrapper, she sat down with them under the lamp. The packet lay in her lap a long time, however, before she decided to detach the envelope. Her hesitation came not from her feeling in any degree that this roll of printed sheets had the sanctity of a letter, a seal that she might not discreetly break, but from an insurmountable nervousness as to what she might find within. She sat there for an hour, with her head resting on the back of her chair and her eyes closed; but she had not fallen asleep—Lady Chasemore was very wide-awake indeed. She was living for the moment in a kind of concentration of memory, thinking over everything that had fallen from her husband's lips after he began, as I have said, to relieve himself. It turned out that the opinion he had formed of the order of society in the United States was even less favourable than she had had reason to fear. There were not many things it would have occurred to him to commend, and the few exceptions related to the matters that were not most characteristic of the country—not idiosyncrasies of American life. The idiosyncrasies he had held to be one and all detestable. The whole spectacle was a vivid warning, a consummate illustration of the horrors of democracy. The only thing that had saved the misbegotten republic as yet was its margin, its geographical vastness; but that was now discounted and exhausted. For the rest every democratic vice was in the ascendant and could be studied there *sur le vif*; he could not be too thankful that he had not



delayed longer to go over and master the subject. He had come back with a head full of lessons and a heart fired with the resolve to enforce them upon his own people, who, as Agatha knew, had begun to move in the same lamentable direction. As she listened to him she perceived the mistake she had made in not going to the West with him, for it was from that part of the country that he had drawn his most formidable anecdotes and examples. Of these he produced a terrific array ; he spoke by book, he overflowed with facts and figures, and his wife felt herself submerged by the deep, bitter waters. She even felt what a pity it was that she had not dragged him away from that vulgar little legislator whom he had stuck to so in the train, coming from Washington ; yet it did not matter—a little more or a little less—the whole affair had rubbed him so the wrong way, exasperated his taste, confounded his traditions. He proved to have disliked quite unspeakably things that she supposed he liked, to have suffered acutely on occasions when she thought he was really pleased. It would appear that there had been no occasion, except once sitting at dinner between Mrs. Redwood and Mrs. Eugene, when he was really pleased. Even his long chat with the Pennsylvania representative had made him almost ill at the time. His wife could be none the less struck with the ability which had enabled him to absorb so much knowledge in so short a time ; he had not only gobbled up facts, he had arranged them in a magnificent order, and she was proud of his being so clever even when he made her bleed by the way he talked. He had had no intention whatever of this, and he was as much surprised as touched when she broke out into a

passionate appeal to him not to publish such horrible misrepresentations. She defended her country with exaltation, and so far as was possible in the face of his own flood of statistics, of anecdotes of 'lobbying,' of the corruption of public life, for which she was unprepared, endeavouring to gainsay him in the particulars as well as in the generals, she maintained that he had seen everything wrong, seen it through the distortion of prejudice, of a hostile temperament, in the light—or rather in the darkness—of wishing to find weapons to worry the opposite party in England. Of course America had its faults, but on the whole it was a much finer country than any other, finer even than his clumsy, congested old England, where there was plenty to do to sweep the house clean, if he would give a little more of his time to that. Scandals for scandals she had heard more since she came to England than all the years she had lived at home. She forbore to quote Macarthy to him (she had reasons for not doing so), but something of the spirit of Macarthy flamed up in her as she spoke.

Sir Rufus smiled at her vehemence ; he took it in perfectly good part, though it evidently left him not a little astonished. He had forgotten that America was hers—that she had any allegiance but the allegiance of her marriage. He had made her his own and, being the intense Englishman that he was, it had never occurred to him to doubt that she now partook of his quality in the same degree as himself. He had assimilated her, as it were, completely, and he had assumed that she had also assimilated him and his country with him—a process which would have for its consequence that the other country, the ugly, vulgar, importunate one, would be, as he mentally

phrased it to himself, 'shunted.' That it had not been was the proof of rather a morbid sensibility, which tenderness and time would still assuage. Sir Rufus was tender, he reassured his wife on the spot, in the first place by telling her that she knew nothing whatever about the United States (it was astonishing how little many of the people in the country itself knew about them), and in the second by promising her that he would not print a word to which her approval should not be expressly given. She should countersign every page before it went to press, and none should leave the house without her *visé*. She wished to know if he possibly could have forgotten—so strange would it be—that she had told him long ago, at Cadenabbia, how horrible it would be to her to find herself married to a man harbouring evil thoughts of her fatherland. He remembered this declaration perfectly and others that had followed it, but was prepared to ask if she on her side recollected giving him notice that she should convert him into an admirer of transatlantic peculiarities. She had had an excellent opportunity, but she had not carried out her plan. He had been passive in her hands, she could have done what she liked with him (had not he offered, that night by the lake of Como, to throw up his career and go and live with her in some beastly American town? and he had really meant it—upon his honour he had!), so that if the conversion had not come off whose fault was it but hers? She had not gone to work with any sort of earnestness. At all events now it was too late; he had seen for himself—the impression was made. Two points were vivid beyond the others in Lady Chase-more's evocation of the scene on the ship; one was

her husband's insistence on the fact that he had not the smallest animosity to the American people, but had only his own English brothers in view, wished only to protect and save them, to point a certain moral as it never had been pointed before ; the other was his pledge that nothing should be made public without her assent.

As at last she broke the envelope of the packet in her lap she wondered how much she should find to assent to. More perhaps than a third person judging the case would have expected ; for after what had passed between them Sir Rufus must have taken great pains to tone down his opinions—or at least the expression of them.

## VII

HE came back to Grosvenor Place the next evening very late and on asking for his wife was told that she was in her apartments. He was furthermore informed that she was to have dined out but had given it up, countermanding the carriage at the last moment and despatching a note instead. On Sir Rufus's asking if she were ill it was added that she had seemed not quite right and had not left the house since the day before. A minute later he found her in her own sitting-room, where she appeared to have been walking up and down. She stopped when he entered and stood there looking at him; she was in her dressing-gown, very pale, and she received him without a smile. He went up to her, kissed her, saw something strange in her eyes and asked with eagerness if she had been suffering. 'Yes, yes,' she said, 'but I have not been ill,' and the next moment flung herself upon his neck and buried her face there, sobbing yet at the same time stifling her sobs. Inarticulate words were mingled with them and it was not till after a moment he understood that she was saying, 'How could you? ah, how *could* you?' He failed to understand her allusion, and while he was still in the dark she recovered herself and broke

away from him. She went quickly to a drawer and possessed herself of a parcel of papers which she held out to him, this time without meeting his eyes. 'Please take them away—take them away for ever. It's your book—the things from the printers. I saw them on the table—I guessed what they were—I opened them to see. I read them—I read them. Please take them away.'

He had by this time become aware that even though she had flung herself upon his breast his wife was animated by a spirit of the deepest reproach, an exquisite sense of injury. When he first saw the papers he failed to recognise his book: it had not been in his mind. He took them from her with an exclamation of wonder, accompanied by a laugh which was meant in kindness, and turned them over, glancing at page after page. Disconcerted as he was at the condition in which Agatha presented herself he was still accessible to that agreeable titillation which a man feels on seeing his prose 'set up.' Sir Rufus had been quoted and reported by the newspapers and had put into circulation several little pamphlets, but this was his first contribution to the regular literature of his country, and his publishers had given him a very handsome page. Its striking beauty held him a moment; then his eyes passed back to his wife, who with her grand, cold, wounded air was also very handsome. 'My dear girl, do you think me an awful brute? have I made you ill?' he asked. He declared that he had no idea he had gone so far as to shock her—he had left out such a lot; he had tried to keep the sting out of everything; he had made it all butter and honey. But he begged her not to get into a state; he would



go over the whole thing with her if she liked—make any changes she should require. It would spoil the book, but he would rather do that than spoil her perfect temper. It was in a highly jocular manner that he made this allusion to her temper, and it was impressed upon her that he was not too much discomposed by her discomposure to be able to joke. She took notice of two things: the first of which was that he had a perfectly good conscience and that no accusing eye that might have been turned upon him would have made him change colour. He had no sense that he had broken faith with her, and he really thought his horrible book was very mild. He spoke the simple truth in saying that for her sake he had endeavoured to qualify his strictures, and strange as it might appear he honestly believed he had succeeded. Later, at other times, Agatha wondered what he would have written if he had felt himself free. What she observed in the second place was that though he saw she was much upset he did not in the least sound the depth of her distress or, as she herself would have said, of her shame. He never would—he never would; he could not enter into her feelings, because he could not believe in them: they could only strike him as exaggerated and factitious. He had given her a country, a magnificent one, and why in the name of common sense was she making him a scene about another? It was morbid—it was mad.

When he accused her of this extravagance it was very simple for her to meet his surprise with a greater astonishment—astonishment at his being able to allow so little for her just susceptibility. He could not take it seriously that she had American

feelings ; he could not believe that it would make a terrible difference in her happiness to go about the world as the wife, the cynical, consenting wife of the author of a blow dealt with that brutality at a breast to which she owed filial honour. She did not say to him that she should never hold her head up before Macarthy again (her strength had been that hitherto, as against Macarthy, she was perfectly straight), but it was in a great degree the prefigurement of her brother's cold, lifelong scorn that had kindled in her, while she awaited her husband's return, the passion with which she now protested. He would never read *The Modern Warning* but he would hear all about it ; he would meet it in the newspapers, in every one's talk ; the very voices of the air would distil the worst pages into his ear and make the scandal of her participation even greater than—as heaven knew—it would deserve to be. She thought of the month of renewed association, of happy, pure impressions that she had spent a year before in the midst of American kindness, in the midst of memories more innocent than her visions of to-day ; and the effect of this retrospect was galling in the face of her possible shame. Shame—shame : she repeated that word to Sir Rufus in a tone which made him stare, as if it dawned upon him that her reason was perhaps deserting her. That shame should attach itself to his wife in consequence of any behaviour of *his* was an idea that he had to make a very considerable effort to embrace ; and while his candour betrayed it his wife was touched even through her resentment by seeing that she had not made him angry. He thought she was strangely unreasonable, but he was determined not to fall into that vice on his own side.

She was silent about Macarthy because Sir Rufus had accused her before her marriage of being afraid of him, and she had then resolved never again to incur such a taunt ; but before things had gone much further between them she reminded her husband that she had Irish blood, the blood of the people, in her veins and that he must take that into account in measuring the provocation he might think it safe to heap upon her. She was far from being a fanatic on this subject, as he knew ; but when America was made out to be an object of holy horror to virtuous England she could not but remember that millions of her Celtic cousins had found refuge there from the blessed English dispensation and be struck with his recklessness in challenging comparisons which were better left to sleep.

When his wife began to represent herself as Irish Sir Rufus evidently thought her 'off her head' indeed : it was the first he had heard of it since she communicated the mystic fact to him on the lake of Como. Nevertheless he argued with her for half an hour as if she were sane, and before they separated he made her a liberal concession, such as only a perfectly lucid mind would be able to appreciate. This was a simple indulgence, at the end of their midnight discussion ; it was not dictated by any recognition of his having been unjust ; for though his wife reiterated this charge with a sacred fire in her eyes which made them more beautiful than he had ever known them he took his stand, in his own stubborn opinion, too firmly upon piles of evidence, revelations of political fraud and corruption, and the 'whole tone of the newspapers'—to speak only of that. He remarked to her that clearly he must

simply give way to her opposition. If she were going to suffer so inordinately it settled the question. The book should not be published and they would say no more about it. He would put it away, he would burn it up and *The Modern Warning* should be as if it had never been. Amen! amen! Lady Chasemore accepted this sacrifice with eagerness, although her husband (it must be added) did not fail to place before her the exceeding greatness of it. He did not lose his temper, he was not petulant nor spiteful, he did not throw up his project and his vision of literary distinction in a huff; but he called her attention very vividly and solemnly to the fact that in deferring to the feelings she so uncompromisingly expressed he renounced the dream of rendering a signal service to his country. There was a certain bitterness in his smile as he told her that *her* wish was the only thing in the world that could have made him throw away such a golden opportunity. The rest of his life would never offer him such another; but patriotism might go to the dogs if only it were settled that she should not have a grudge. He did not care what became of poor old England if once that precious result were obtained; poor old England might pursue impure delusions and rattle down hill as fast as she chose for want of the word his voice would have spoken—really inspired as he held it to be by the justice of his cause.

Lady Chasemore flattered herself that they did not drop the subject that night in acrimony; there was nothing of this in the long kiss which she took from her husband's lips, with wet eyes, with a grateful, comprehensive murmur. It seemed to her that nothing could be fairer or finer than their mutual

confidence ; her husband's concession was gallant in the extreme ; but even more than this was it impressed upon her that her own affection was perfect, since it could accept such a renunciation without a fear of the aftertaste. She had been in love with Sir Rufus from 'the day he sought her hand at Cadenabbia, but she was never so much in love with him as during the weeks that immediately followed his withdrawal of his book. It was agreed between them that neither of them would speak of the circumstance again, but she at least, in private, devoted an immense deal of meditation to it. It gave her a tremendous reprieve, lifted a nightmare off her breast, and that in turn gave her freedom to reflect that probably few men would have made such a graceful surrender. She wanted him to understand, or at any rate she wanted to understand herself, that in all its particulars too she thoroughly appreciated it ; if he really was unable to conceive how she could feel as she did, it was all the more generous of him to comply blindly, to take her at her word, little as he could make of it. It did not become less obvious to Lady Chasemore, but quite the contrary, as the weeks went on, that *The Modern Warning* would have been a masterpiece of its class. In her room, that evening, her husband had told her that the best of him intellectually had gone into it, that he believed he had uttered certain truths there as they never would be uttered again—contributed his grain of gold to the limited sum of human wisdom. He had done something to help his country, and then—to please her—he had undone it. Above all it was delightful to her that he had not been sullen or rancorous about it, that he never made her pay for his magnanimity. He neither



sighed nor scowled nor took on the air of a domestic martyr ; he came and went with his usual step and his usual smile, remaining to all appearance the same fresh-coloured, decided, accomplished high official.

Therefore it is that I find it difficult to explain how it was that Lady Chasemore began to feel at the end of a few months that their difficulties had after all not become the mere reminiscence of a flurry, making present security more deep. What if the flurry continued impalpably, insidiously, under the surface? She thought there had been no change, but now she suspected that there was at least a difference. She had read Tennyson and she knew the famous phrase about the little rift within the lute. It came back to her with a larger meaning, it haunted her at last, and she asked herself whether when she accepted her husband's relinquishment it had been her happiness and his that she staked and threw away. In the light of this fear she struck herself as having lived in a fool's paradise—a misfortune from which she had ever prayed to be delivered. She wanted in every situation to know the worst, and in this case she had not known it ; at least she knew it only now, in the shape of the formidable fact that Sir Rufus's outward good manners misrepresented his real reaction. At present she began anxiously, broodingly to take this reaction for granted and to see signs of it in the very things which she had regarded at first as signs of resignation. She secretly watched his face ; she privately counted his words. When she began to do this it was no very long time before she made up her mind that the latter had become much fewer—that Sir Rufus



talked to her very much less than he had done of old. He took no revenge, but he was cold, and in his coldness there was something horribly inevitable. He looked at her less and less, whereas formerly his eyes had had no more agreeable occupation. She tried to teach herself that her suspicions were woven of air and were an offence to a just man's character; she remembered that Sir Rufus had told her she was morbid, and if the charge had not been true at the time it might very well be true now. But the effect of this reflection was only to suggest to her that Sir Rufus himself was morbid and that her behaviour had made him so. It was the last thing that would be in his nature, but she had subjected that nature to an injurious strain. He was feeling it now; he was feeling that he had failed in the duty of a good citizen: a good citizen being what he had ever most earnestly proposed to himself to be. Lady Chasemore pictured to herself that his cheek burned for this when it was turned away from her—that he ground his teeth with shame in the watches of the night. Then it came over her with unspeakable bitterness that there had been no real solution of their difficulty; that it was too great to be settled by so simple an arrangement as that—an arrangement too primitive for a complicated world. Nothing was less simple than to bury one's gold and live without the interest.

It is a singular circumstance, and suggesting perhaps a perversion of the imagination under the influence of distress, but Lady Chasemore at this time found herself thinking with a kind of baffled pride of the merits of *The Modern Warning* as a literary composition, a political essay. It would

have been dreadful for her, but at least it would have been superb, and that was what was naturally enough present to the defeated author as he tossed through the sleepless hours. She determined at last to question him, to confess her fears, to make him tell her whether his weakness—if he considered it a weakness—really did rankle; though when he made the sacrifice months before (nearly a year had come round) he had let her know that he wished the subject buried between them for evermore. She approached it with some trepidation, and the manner in which he looked at her as she stammered out her inquiry was not such as to make the effort easier. He waited in silence till she had expressed herself as she best could, without helping her, without showing that he guessed her trouble, her need to be assured that he did not feel her to have been cruel. Did he?—*did* he? that was what she wanted to be certain of. Sir Rufus's answer was in itself a question; he demanded what she meant by imputing to him such hypocrisy, such bad faith. What did she take him for and what right had he given her to make a new scene, when he flattered himself the last pretext had been removed? If he had been dissatisfied she might be very sure he would have told her so; and as he had not told her she might pay him the compliment to believe he was honest. He expressed the hope—and for the first time in his life he was stern with her—that this would be the last endeavour on her part to revive an odious topic. His sternness was of no avail; it neither wounded her nor comforted her; it only had the effect of making her perfectly sure that he suffered and that he regarded himself as a kind of traitor. He was

one more in the long list of those whom a woman had ruined, who had sold themselves, sold their honour and the commonwealth, for a fair face, a quiet life, a show of tears, a bribe of caresses. The vision of this smothered pain, which he tried to carry off as a gentleman should, only ministered to the love she had ever borne him—the love that had had the power originally to throw her into his arms in the face of an opposing force. As month followed month all her nature centred itself in this feeling; she loved him more than ever and yet she had been the cause of the most tormenting thing that had ever happened to him. This was a tragic contradiction, impossible to bear, and she sat staring at it with tears of rage.

One day she had occasion to tell him that she had received a letter from Macarthy, who announced that he should soon sail for Europe, even intimated that he should spend two or three weeks in London. He had been overworked, it was years since he had had a proper holiday, and the doctor threatened him with nervous prostration unless he very soon broke off everything. His sister had a vision of his reason for offering to let her see him in England; it was a piece of appreciation on Macarthy's part, a reward for their having behaved—that is, for Sir Rufus's having behaved, apparently under her influence—better than might have been expected. He had the good taste not to bring out his insolent book, and Macarthy gave this little sign, the most mollified thing he had done as yet, that he noticed. If Lady Chasemore had not at this moment been thinking of something else it might have occurred to her that nervous prostration, in her brother's organism, had

already set in. The prospect of his visit held Sir Rufus's attention very briefly, and in a few minutes Agatha herself ceased to dwell upon it. Suddenly, illogically, fantastically, she could not have told why, at that moment and in that place, for she had had no such intention when she came into the room, she broke out: 'My own darling, do you know what has come over me? I have changed entirely—I see it differently; I want you to publish that grand thing.' And she stood there smiling at him, expressing the transformation of her feeling so well that he might have been forgiven for not doubting it.

Nevertheless he did doubt it, especially at first. But she repeated, she pressed, she insisted; once she had spoken in this sense she abounded and overflowed. It went on for several days (he had begun by refusing to listen to her, for even in touching the question she had violated his express command), and by the end of a week she persuaded him that she had really come round. She was extremely ingenious and plausible in tracing the process by which she had done so, and she drew from him the confession (they kissed a great deal after it was made) that the manuscript of *The Modern Warning* had not been destroyed at all, but was safely locked up in a cabinet, together with the interrupted proofs. She doubtless placed her tergiversation in a more natural light than her biographer has been able to do: he however will spare the reader the exertion of following the impalpable clue which leads to the heart of the labyrinth. A month was still to elapse before Macarthy would show himself, and during this time she had the leisure and freedom of mind to consider the sort of

face with which she should meet him, her husband having virtually promised that he would send the book back to the printers. Now, of course, she renounced all pretension of censorship; she had nothing to do with it; it might be whatever he liked; she gave him formal notice that she should not even look at it after it was printed. It was his affair altogether now—it had ceased to be hers. A hard crust had formed itself in the course of a year over a sensibility that was once so tender; this she admitted was very strange, but it would be stranger still if (with the value that he had originally set upon his opportunity) he should fail to feel that he might hammer away at it. In this case would not the morbidness be quite on *his* side? Several times, during the period that preceded Macarthy's arrival, Lady Chase-more saw on the table in the hall little packets which reminded her of the roll of proofs she had opened that evening in her room. Her courage never failed her, and an observer of her present relations with her husband might easily have been excused for believing that the solution which at one time appeared so illusory was now valid for earthly purposes. Sir Rufus was immensely taken up with the resumption of his task; the revision of his original pages went forward the more rapidly that in fact, though his wife was unaware of it, they had repeatedly been in his hands since he put them away. He had retouched and amended them, by the midnight lamp, disinterestedly, platonically, hypothetically; and the alterations and improvements which suggest themselves when valuable ideas are laid by to ripen, like a row of pears on a shelf, started into life and liberty. Sir Rufus was as happy as a man who after having



been obliged for a long time to entertain a passion in secret finds it recognised and legitimated, finds that the obstacles are removed and he may conduct his beloved to the altar.

Nevertheless when Macarthy Grice alighted at the door of his sister's house—he had assented at the last to her urgent request that he would make it his habitation during his stay in London—he stepped into an atmosphere of sudden alarm and dismay. It was late in the afternoon, a couple of hours before dinner, and it so happened that Sir Rufus drove up at the moment the American traveller issued from the carriage that had been sent for him. The two men exchanged greetings on the steps of the house, but in the next breath Macarthy's host asked what had become of Agatha, whether she had not gone to the station to meet him, as she had announced at noon, when Sir Rufus saw her last, that she intended.

It appeared that she had not accompanied the carriage ; Macarthy had been met only by one of the servants, who had been with the Chasemores to America and was therefore in a position to recognise him. This functionary said to Sir Rufus that her ladyship had sent him down word an hour before the carriage started that she had altered her intention and he was to go on without her. By this time the door of the house had been thrown open ; the butler and the other footman had come to the front. They had not, however, their usual perpendicular demeanour, and the master's eye immediately saw that there was something wrong in the house. This apprehension was confirmed by the butler on the instant, before he had time to ask a question.



‘We are afraid her ladyship is ill, sir ; rather seriously, sir ; we have but this moment discovered it, sir ; her maid is with her, sir, and the other women.’

Sir Rufus started ; he paused but a single instant, looking from one of the men to the other. Their faces were very white ; they had a strange, scared expression. ‘What do you mean by rather seriously?—what the devil has happened?’ But he had sprung to the stairs—he was half-way up before they could answer.

‘You had better go up, sir, really,’ said the butler to Macarthy, who was planted there and had turned as white as himself. ‘We are afraid she has taken something.’

‘Taken something?’

‘By mistake, sir, you know, sir,’ quavered the footman, looking at his companion. There were tears in the footman’s eyes. Macarthy felt sick.

‘And there’s no doctor? You don’t send? You stand gaping?’

‘We are going, sir—we have already gone!’ cried both the men together. ‘He’ll come from the hospital, round the corner ; he’ll be here by the time you’re upstairs. It was but this very moment, sir, just before you rang the bell,’ one of them went on. The footman who had come with Macarthy from Euston dashed out of the house and he himself followed the direction his brother-in-law had taken. The butler was with him, saying he didn’t know what—that it was only while they were waiting—that it would be a stroke for Sir Rufus. He got before him, on the upper landing ; he led the way to Lady Chasemore’s room, the door of which was open, revealing a horrible hush and, beyond the interior, a flurried, gasping

flight of female domestics. Sir Rufus was there, he was at the bed still ; he had cleared the room ; two of the women had remained, they had hold of Lady Chasemore, who lay there passive, with a lifeless arm that caught Macarthy's eye—calling her, chafing her, pushing each other, saying that she would come to in a minute. Sir Rufus had apparently been staring at his wife in stupefaction and horror, but as Macarthy came to the bed he caught her up in his arms, pressing her to his bosom, and the American visitor met his face glaring at him over her shoulder, convulsed and transformed. 'She has taken something, but only by mistake :' he was conscious that the butler was saying that again, behind him, in his ear.

'By God, you have killed her ! it's *your* infernal work !' cried Sir Rufus, in a voice that matched his terrible face.

'I have killed her?' answered Macarthy, bewildered and appalled.

'Your damned fantastic opposition—the fear of meeting you,' Sir Rufus went on. But his words lost themselves, as he bent over her, in violent kisses and imprecations, in demands whether nothing could be done, why the doctor was not there ; in clumsy passionate attempts to arouse, to revive.

'Oh, I am sure she wanted you to come. She was very well this morning, sir,' the waiting-maid broke out, to Macarthy, contradicting Sir Rufus in her fright and protesting again that it was nothing, that it was a faint, for the very pleasure, that her ladyship would come round. The other woman had picked up a little phial. She thrust it at Macarthy with the boldness of their common distress, and as he took it from her mechanically he perceived that it was empty

and had a strange odour. He sniffed it—then with a shout of horror flung it away. He rushed at his sister and for a moment almost had a struggle with her husband for the possession of her body, in which, as soon as he touched it, he felt the absence of life. Then she was on the bed again, beautiful, irresponsive, inanimate, and they were both beside her for an instant, after which Sir Rufus broke away and staggered out of the room. It seemed an eternity to Macarthy while he waited, though it had already come over him that he was waiting only for something still worse. The women talked, tried to tell him things; one of them said something about the pity of his coming all the way from America on purpose. Agatha was beautiful; there was no disfigurement. The butler had gone out with Sir Rufus and he came back with him, reappearing first, and with the doctor. Macarthy did not even heed what the doctor said. By this time he knew it all for himself. He flung himself into a chair, overwhelmed, covering his face with the cape of his ulster. The odour of the little phial was in his nostrils. He let the doctor lead him out without resistance, scarcely with consciousness, after some minutes.

Lady Chasemore had taken something—the doctor gave it a name—but it was not by mistake. In the hall, downstairs, he stood looking at Macarthy, kindly, soothingly, tentatively, with his hand on his shoulder. ‘Had she—a—had she some domestic grief?’ Macarthy heard him ask. He could not stay in the house—not with Chasemore. The servant who had brought him from the station took him to an hotel, with his luggage, in the carriage, which was still at the door—a horrible hotel where, in a dismal,

dingy back room, with chimney-pots outside, he spent a night of unsurpassable anguish. He could not understand, and he howled to himself, 'Why, *why*, just now?' Sir Rufus, in the other house, had exactly such another vigil: it was plain enough that this was the case when, the next morning, he came to the hotel. He held out his hand to Macarthy—he appeared to take back his monstrous words of the evening before. He made him return to Grosvenor Crescent; he made him spend three days there, three days during which the two men scarcely exchanged a word. But the rest of the holiday that Macarthy had undertaken for the benefit of his health was passed upon the Continent, with little present evidence that he should find what he had sought. *The Modern Warning* has not yet been published, but it may still appear. This doubtless will depend upon whether, this time, the sheets have really been destroyed—buried in Lady Chasemore's grave or only put back into the cabinet.

THE END









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